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Bharata Natya and other Dances of Tamil Nad

by
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PREFACE

It is a part of the working of the College of Indian Music, Dance & Dramatics, M. S. University of Baroda to invite outstanding experts in their respective fields to deliver lectures on Music, Dance and Drama, for the benefit of the students in these subjects. The text of this book constitutes the material of two such lectures which were delivered by Mr. E. Krishna Iyer, Honorary Secretary, Madras State Sangita Nataka Sangam. Mr. Iyer is well known as one of the pioneers who worked zealously for the revival of Bharata Natya, and also other dance forms of TAMIL Nad, such as the classical Bhagavata Mela Nataka and the various folk dances. Having been intimately associated with the dance forms of Tamil Nad, Mr. Iyer is specially qualified to speak on these arts. Though this has been published primarily for the benefit of the students of the Dance Department of this College, I believe, it will also help all those who would like to acquaint themselves with our cultural heritage.

College of Indian Music, Dance
& Dramatics, Baroda.

R. C. MEHTA.
Principal

Dated 19-6-1957.

CONTENTS

	Page
I Evolution of Bharata Natya...	I
II Bharata Natya in Practice...	28
III Classical Dance-Drama of South India in Bharata Natya Technique...	62
IV Kuravanji Ballet...	71
V Folk Dances of Tamil Nad...	75

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 Dances of Tamilnad
 (L. English) *Shri E. Krishna Iyer*

I. EVOLUTION OF BHARATA NATYA

The origins of dance must be traced to the primæval instinct of all living beings. Because, it is nothing but the outward manifestation of inner feeling or emotion mostly of joy in the form of bodily movements. This instinct must have come earlier than that of speech or song. Whether human beings and birds that could also sing or animals or insects that could only jump, all living beings resorted to dancing as the earliest and easiest means of expressing their exuberance of spirits.

While lower beings could follow only their natural instincts and habits in dancing, the human race with its developed brains improved upon nature and instinct and created newer and newer forms of dancing through its own artifice.

Love and war seem to have been the major motive springs for dance in almost all living beings. Among men and women however, religion also has been another impetus for it. For worshipping or propitiating Gods and Goddesses, driving away evil spirits and warding off epidemics, dancing has been employed. Bringing in rains, fertility, good harvests and the like good things of life and expression of joy over these have also been the sources of inspiration for dance. Hence, all the world over, the art of dancing has been developed in multitudinous forms in various communities. But all the same, the growth and develop-

ment of the art, its purpose and significance have been different among different people, according to their respective basic temperaments, ideologies, habits, manners and surroundings. However, in ancient times, dancing in most countries had been closely associated with religious rites and worship as a means of propitiating the Gods, Goddesses and nature spirits in whom people had faith or whom they feared. In course of time, it came to be used for secular purposes also and has tended more and more to become a social pastime and a means of evoking aesthetic pleasure or sensuous enjoyment.

Among most of the undeveloped indigenous races of Africa, the Red Indians of America, the natives of Hawai and the hill tribes of India, it has continued to be mostly a part of the religious rituals and is still of the primitive type. Love and war too are the other motive forces for it. In ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome as in India, it was extensively used for religious purposes in an increasingly refined manner. All the same, in Egypt it meant mostly a series of well defined poses. The Greeks aimed at the body beautiful through the art. The Romans took to it as interpretation of poetry with literary flavour. Ancient European countries simply followed the culture of Greece and Rome. Later on they developed it more and more as a social pastime and delectation with a large number of people coming together. Russians brought it to artistic eminence in the shape of highly developed ballets. In India and East Asia, it has been widely

used for religious as well as secular or social purposes but mostly with a dominant religious or ethical motive or purpose.

Existing dance forms all over the world can be classified as (1) primitive among uncivilised communities, (2) simple but somewhat refined folk dances among the masses of civilised or semi-civilised communities, (3) social group dances of a higher nature and (4) highly developed dances with varying qualities of technique and artistry for stage purposes in both western and Eastern countries.

Though all forms of highly cultivated dancing involves expression of some idea through bodily poses and movements in rhythm, the difference between the art of the West and the East and India in particular cannot be missed. Dance in the former, has come to be regarded during the last two centuries more and more as a means of self expression or the artist's individual personality; whether it is the Pavine, Courante or Minute of France, the Fandango of Spain or the Waltz or Foxtrot of Germany or Britain or the Ballet of Russia. In Asiatic countries and India in particular, the conception of the art has been the interpretation of the universal and the idealistic and the sublimation of ideas by the elimination of individual personality through well defined traditional codes, conventions, symbols and technique.

Dance as an art anywhere is a sort of imitation of nature. But its Western type attempts in the main

to portray nature with much of realism. Indian and Eastern types, on the contrary, while taking nature as its source and following it to some extent, seek also to go beyond it, to eschew realism as far as possible and to bring out mental attitudes of the most subtle variety with an aesthetic as well as an ethical purpose. As a natural corollary to these, in technique also the two systems differ. Western art, with all its admirable technique in rhythm, is mostly of mute poses and movements according to changing individual notions and fancies ; while Indian art employs conventions in poses and movements, significantly symbolic gestures and facial expression also to bring out various shades of inner emotion. In short, Western art is for the most part sensory, representing an object or action for its own sake, while the Eastern is symbolical and imaginative, conveying a philosophic or ethical conception, through suggestive representation of objects and action. On the whole, among other things that which distinguishes Indian dancing from that of the West is the unique gesture language of the former.

“ It is impossible”, says Dr. Curts Sachs, the author of “ World History of Dancing ” to express the restrained tenderness and simple grandeur of these gesture dances. They must be experienced ; they cannot be described. A dance art of this superb character is bound up with cultures that possess also in painting and the plastic arts, an incomparable ability to reveal with the vital flash of a single stroke the ultimate significance of a natural phenomenon.

“ With the fleeting touch of a paint brush, with the angular twist of a carving tool, they divest Gods, men and nature of their chance validity and transport them into that land of dreams where the deepest essence of things, instead of being blurred by the twilight of time, flashes forth in vivid clarity. That is the art of gesture. It is given to cultures of this type to lead the imitative dance to a climax.

“ But in Europe, the world of perspective, of three dimensional drawing of space and photographic fidelity to everyday things, we have followed other paths.... The strong preference for the play of hands, however is not a matter of chance and the reduction of it to a system is still less so. ”

Those quotations can give a clue to the understanding of many things relating to the Indian art. In the first place, if abhinaya the gesture language is its pre-eminent and distinguishing characteristic, it is so deliberately and not by chance or accident. Secondly, its influence on and inspiration for all allied arts has been all embracing, profound and far-reaching. Thirdly, it reveals how the ruling factor in the ideal, production and presentation of Hindu classical dance and allied arts has been the “ doctrine of suggestion ” as against realism, consistent with and marking that out as the highest and truest conception of great and real art and beauty. Fourthly, it shows, how this basic motive had its effect on the nature of the audience, the spectators to whom it was presented,

with its necessary demand on their imaginative faculties. Last but not least, it explains how and why all these led to the deliberate and vast development of the technique or rules and conventions with meticulous care for details in the ancient works for the guidance and benefit of composers and playwrights, partaking artists and audiences. Incidentally, a consideration of all these factors will give also some real help in properly understanding and estimating the comparative aesthetic values of the different forms of the dance art as they have come down to us.

BASICS OF INDIAN DANCE

The conception of the Hindu art of Dancing from the earliest times has been in the main spiritual. It had been a necessary adjunct to religious rites from Vedic times. No wonder, divine origin is attributed to it, as having been invented by Brahma the Lord of Creation himself, embodying in it the essence of the four Vedas and also as having been presented to the world by no less than Lord SIVA and his consort PARVATHI in the two-characteristic forms of TANDAVA, the manly and forceful, and LASYA, the feminine and graceful. The close association of Lord Siva with dance as NATARAJA (King of dancers) with its all embracing Cosmic conception is of no ordinary significance to the art. Creation, preservation, activity and destruction are all nothing but a play of the Will of the supreme being. "Naught is or moves but by His Will".

A grand conception of this nature raises Indian art to a magnificent spiritual plane typical of all Hindu culture and has been a source of no small inspiration to the allied arts of painting, sculpture and iconography to perpetuate or immortalise it by visual representation in stone, colour and metal.

NATARAJA

Any dance figure of Nataraja in these, is an ever inspiring feast to the eyes of even a lay onlooker, with its wonderful artistry of bodyline pose and expression. and more so to those of the spirituality minded connoisseur, with his understanding of its significance through the interpretations given to it like the following :

“ Lord of the Eternal Cosmic Dance ! His matted and tawny locks are dancing to rhythm. His moon-like face sways as well with a benevolent smile. His wide open lotus eyes dance too. The moon in his locks vibrates in unison. The drum in his hand calls to the universe in rhythm to the music of the spheres. The skin of the tiger which he wears quivers. His hand of benediction moves in harmony. One leg of his is lifted up and the other presses down the forces of evil and yet moves. His Consort by his side rejoices over the whole spectacle. Such is the divine dance of the Lord of Chidambaram, the embodiment of intellect, perception, truth and bliss, to whom the whole world bows in reverence ”.

According to Saiva Siddhanta, the Cosmic dance of Lord Siva is of seven kinds. (1) Srishti, (2) and (3) Sthithi, (4) Samhara, (5) Tirobhava, (6) Anugraha, and (7) Ananda, each indicated by separate pose. The last is the well known figure that we see in most of the temples. (These were demonstrated by the speaker).

Thus the prime motive of the Indian Classical Dance has been spiritual, though it has been extensively used for secular purposes as well. Hence it was taken too seriously and rarely conceived of as a mere pastime or light entertainment but was intended by devotees to be a Yoga in itself to help to spiritual salvation. It had no place for low sensuousness or vulgarity. Rules and conventions were laid down to regulate it so as to keep it up to high standards.

Though with the change of times, conceptions about art and its purpose too are bound to change, the basic ideal of Indian art cannot so easily change and has to be kept in mind in judging and evaluating present day art and artists professing to expound Indian Classical Dances, as most of the chief forms of dancing extant in India now, have been evolved from the ancient parent stock.

Nowhere else as in India have the fine arts been systematically and effectively used for centuries to refine and ennoble humanity by inculcating into the minds of the people at large an abiding faith in and love for God, good conduct in life and a sense of beauty : and

Bharata Natya has been the most prominent among them, because in reality it synchronises in itself *Kavitha and Sangeetha, Nrta and Abhinaya*, religion and philosophy and has all along been a source of inspiration for the allied arts of classical painting sculpture and iconography. At the very threshold to the study of Indian dancing, one is confronted with a ready made, vast and comprehensive system of art that had been highly developed over two thousand years ago with every thing about it in theory and practice elaborately analysed, codified and systematised unlike other dance systems of the world.

Even Western scholars whose invariable fashion is to trace the origins of all art, culture and civilisation to Greek and Roman sources, have to admit that Indian classical dance had been entirely indigenous in origin and growth without borrowing from or being influenced by any alien art and that in its special features and aesthetic quality, it has no peer in any other dance system of the world. In the words of Doctor Curts Sachs again "In the history of dance, Greece has as little to record of actual invention as that of any other Western culture. All that it offers in theme, type, movement and form has been anticipated already by the advanced Asiatic cultures."

As a matter of fact, there is evidence enough to show that it is from India that some of the expressive features of the dance art seem to have seeped into Rome through the Arabs of early times. The unique

gesture language of the East was introduced in a small measure into Western Greek dance in the Alexandrine period. After witnessing such a pantomime of the love of Aras and Aphrodite, even Cynic Demetrius of Nero's time is said to have exclaimed "Man! this is not seeing but hearing and seeing both. It is as if your hands were tongues." In short the classical dance system of India stands out as a monument to the ancient Indian genius which relied on itself and on the culture and traditions of its own land for the invention and high development of the dance art without the adventitious aid of or influence of any alien culture.

Origin and Growth of Bharata Natya

The origins of Bharata Natya cannot easily be traced. *At the very threshold to the study of Indian dancing, one is confronted with a ready made, vast and comprehensive system of art, that had been highly developed over two thousand years ago, with almost everything about it in theory and practice elaborately analysed, codified and systematised unlike other dance systems of the world.*

More than one story have been current about the origin of the art. According to Natya Sastra, the art is said to have been created by Brahma as the Fifth Veda out of the 4 original Vedas and enacted with the help of the 100 sons of Bharata during the flag festival of Indra. Lord Siva is said to have asked Thandu to teach Tandava to Bharata, and Parvathi the Lasya.

II

When Bharata found that certain parts of his art could be rendered appropriately only by women, he asked Brahma to create the Apsaras. Parvathi is said also to have taught the art of dancing to Usha, the latter taught it to the ladies of Dwaraka and they in turn to the Saurashtra women ; and the art spread all over the country through them. According to another story, Oorvasi the celestial nymph taught it to Arjuna, the Pandava hero, the latter to Uttara the Virata princess and Uttara taught it to others. Whether we believe these stories or not, we cannot but admit that Bharata Natya had been of great antiquity.

Bharata's Natya Sastra is ordinarily considered to be the most authoritative treatise on the subject and has been followed by most other writers subsequently. Bharata's date is placed ordinarily between the 2nd and 4th century A.D. It was in the 2nd century that Ilango the Tamil writer composed his 'Silappadikaram' the great Tamil classic, which contains copious information about the dance art. They might or might not have been contemporaries or lived in the same century. Both of them have written about almost the same art, one in the form of a regular treatise and the other as incidental to a story. Hence we can justifiably presume that this classical art had been flourishing in a highly developed form long before the 2nd century A.D.

There seem to have been earlier writers on the art than Bharata. Nandikeswara's *Bharatarnava* is said

to have been earlier than Bharata's Natya Sastra. The "*Abhinaya Dharpana*" also is said to be a part of that Bharatarnava or its abridgement in later times. Bharata also quotes other earlier authors and often cites certain "*Aryas*" and "*Sutras*" in support of his statements in the Natya Sastra. He also refers to the different styles in the art according to the various regions of the country: *Avanthi*, *Dakshinatya*, *Panchali* and *Odhra-Magadhi*, and gives too an idea of the nature of the styles. For example referring to the Dakshinatya style he says, "The Southern (countries) favour various kinds of dances, songs and instrumental music, and abundance of the *Graceful (Kaisiki)* Style and clever and graceful gestures."

From these it can be inferred, that the art had been flourishing in a developed form in the different regions including the Deccan long before the time of Bharata and that the author of Natya Sastra took stock of the art as it had developed in different regions and styles, and codified the rules governing it, disapproving inconsistent or undesirable features that might have crept into it.

Prehistoric Origin and Development

From the discovery of the dancing girl's statue in the Mohen-Ja-Daro excavations, one is tempted to infer, that the art might have been flourishing from four to five thousand years ago throughout India, including Tamil Nad as one of its chief centres. According to Dr. Hall, the Indus valley excavations, have

put back Dravidian civilisation to 5000 B. C. The bronze statue found at Mohen-Ja-Daro is recognised as that of a dancing girl very much resembling her modern sisters in South India.

The prehistoric civilisation of the Dravidians is the bed-rock or foundation on which every invader of India from the Vedic Aryans to the modern Europeans built or tried to build his own cultural edifices. Hinduism itself is accumulated wisdom of the two main races Dravidian and Aryan collected for over 50 centuries. Broadly Saivism was the religion and cult of the Dravidians and they excelled in arts and crafts, astronomy, medicine and other sciences.

The Aryans who entered India between 4000 and 3000 B. C. absorbed the conquered people and their culture as well and developed a grander civilisation, the two races borrowing a good deal from each other. A civilised race like the Dravidians must have contributed much towards the building up of the so-called Aryan civilisation of North India. Centuries later, when the Aryans tried to introduce their culture into the Tamil country, they found *much of what passed off as Aryan culture of the North, already existed in the South*. This no doubt indicates, to what extent the conquered Dravidians of the North had helped in building up the so-called Indo-Aryan civilisation.

The kingdoms of Pandya, Chera and Chola existed even before the coming of the Aryans and are mentioned in the Ramayana and Mahabharata. They

were highly developed and their language Tamil had reached a high stage of literary excellence through long established Sangams (Academies) and was divided into *Iyal*, *Isai* and *Natakam*. Tamil Nad was so highly developed in literature, music, dance and drama, that the incoming Aryans found that they had more to learn than to teach.

In fact according to the traditional beliefs held by ancient and great Tamil poets and critics like Nakkirar of the 2nd Century A.D. :—Tamil Nad was once far extended into the Indian Ocean with its capital then as *South Madura*. It had the *Muthal Sangam* (the first Tamil Academy) flourishing for 4440 years, with 4449 poets and writers including Agastya, the father of Tamil grammar, literature and art. It had on the whole 89 kings in succession ruling over 49 kingdoms between *Pahruli* and *Kumari* rivers. This portion of Tamil Nad was submerged under the sea in about 5400 B.C. and the capital of Tamil Nad was shifted to *Kapatapuram*. Another Sangam (the *Idai Changam* or the middle Sangam) was established and it thrived for 3700 years, with 59 kings and 3700 poets and writers. This region also went under the sea and Tamil Nad re-established itself with its 3rd capital at the present *Madura*. It was there that the 3rd Sangam called *Kadaichangam* (the last Academy) was established in about 1700 B. C. and it lived with 449 poets and writers for 1850 years up to the 2nd Century A.D. into historical times. So according to the traditional beliefs of the Tamils and their literature, Tamil culture

with highly developed music, dance and drama flourished from 9880 B.C. i. e. from 11600 years ago !!

“*Agastyam*”, “*Mudunul*”, “*Isainunukkam*”, “*Gunanul*”, “*Saiyantham*”, “*Seyitrium*”, “*Panchmarapu*”, “*Mathivanar Nataka Tamil*”, and “*Kuthunul*” were some among the many works on dance, drama and music produced during the first two Sangam periods and they were all lost in the deluges. *Tholkappium* the ancient Tamil grammar, with some reference to music and dance and drama also, composed by a disciple of Agastya and belonging to the 2nd Sangam had been saved for posterity. Though many of the works of the first two Tamil Sangams were lost, extracts or authoritative sutras from them as were remembered by later generations are quoted in *extant* Tamil works of later times, just as earlier ‘Aryas’ and ‘Sutras’ from *extinct* works are quoted by Bharata in *Natya Sasta*.

Whether we believe these things or not, they indicate, that the art of dance must have been highly developed long ago from pre-historic times.

As per the *Samhitas*, full fledged dramas like *Supernadyaya* are said to have existed during the times of the Rig Veda. Vedic rituals and folk dances must have contributed to the growth and development of Bharata Natya. Abhinaya in rhythm was used in Vedic rituals. Ordinary music and Puranic recitals become more expressive when accompanied by proper gestures. Even at the present day the

habitual use of gestures (some agreeable and others not unoften grotesque) by musicians is indicative of the impelling instinct to suggest the musical form and inner feeling through them. Likewise, Vedic chants (especially in Samaveda) must have used abhinaya. Vestal Virgins seem to have been employed for the purpose and from that example the later day Devadasi system might have come into vogue for a high spiritual purpose originally. The gesture language or abhinaya in rhythm must have been studied and systematised as *Nritya*. It became naturally an essential part of *Natya* (Hindu Drama) with which *Nritya* was associated.

Dances and dance dramas were current in the Epic age. Ramayana and Mahabharata have ample references to them. The names of many Puranic Gods and Goddesses, heroes and heroines are connected with it. Siva and Parvathi, Ganesa and Subramania, Vishnu as one of the Tirumurthis and in his Avatar as Krishna, Indra and the Apsaras had danced. Apart from these Gods and Goddesses, Arjuna, Uttara and Usha of Mahabharata stories had cultivated the art. In the Epic and Bhuddistic ages, dance troupes were maintained in royal courts. The art flourished during Lord Bhudda's time. It is said that the daughters of Mara attempted to seduce Gautama by their dancing.

The history of abhinaya (gesture language) taken by itself shows, that the art was advanced even before.

500 B.C., the earliest literature being referred to by Panini (500 B.C.) as *Nata Sutra* by Silalin and Krisasva. Hence drama and dance in a developed form must have existed long before it. Patanjali (140 B.C.) refers to dramas like *Kamsa Vada* and *Bali Bhandan*. In *Divyavadana*, King Rudranana's wife Chandravathi is said to have danced to the accompaniment of her husband's Veena. According to Kalidasa's *Malavikagnimitra*, the Royal Court had many dancers and dance-masters and there was a regular palace establishment for the training in and encouragement of Bharata Natya. In Devendra's *Uttaradayana Tika*, King Udaya's wife is said to have danced while her husband played the lute. According to the *Mahavamsa*, Parakrama Bahu I, the king of Ceylon, had in his queen Rupavathi a highly skilled dancer.

The Devadasi establishment and its dances in temples as part of the daily worship had come into vogue all over the country not only in South India but also in the North in places like Puri Jagannath and Ujjain. Kalidasa's '*Megadhuta*' bears evidence to its existence in Ujjain. The title *Acharya* ordinarily given to masters of sacred lore like the Vedas, seems to have been given to masters of the dance art as well. It is evident from the mention of the word *Natya dara*, in the works of those times, and in particular in the description of a Nataka performance in a Bhuddistic work in Sanskrit called *Avadana Sathaka* (200-250 A.D.).

Though Bhuddistic and Jain writers of those times originally considered the fine arts as detracting from the morals of the people, they dealt with music and dancing often in great detail with a view to inculcate morals. Ilango's '*Silappadikaram*' and Sithalai Sathnar's '*Manimekhalai*', the two great Tamil Epics of the 2nd Century A.D. were of that kind and all the same they are a mine of information about the arts of music and dance of a highly developed kind. They show that dancing and music had a very important place in ancient Tamil society. The then technique of these arts differed to some extent from the Carnatic music and Bharata Natya as current in South India today. In Mahamahopadyaya Dr. U. V. Swaminatha Iyer's edition of '*Silappadikaram*' it is said that though much of what is said about music and dance in that work had been explained by great commentators in the past, mostly according to Natya Sastra and other standard works, there were still some special features in the arts as described by that Tamil Classic which were not so explainable. All these indicate, that the dance art might have been created and developed to a high state in pre-Aryan times, that the later Sanskrit works might have embodied most of the features of the old art, that in course of time the common art might have been in vogue throughout the country with most of the old and new features blended and that still some features peculiar to the older Tamil art might have persisted in the South.

Over abundant designs in choreography with meticulous attention to details and exuberant ornamentation and embellishments are well known features that characterise the arts as developed in the South especially in Bharata Natya.

Any way, in ancient India, dance of a highly developed nature was widely practiced, not only in its solo form by the Devadasis, royal personages, noblemen and women and devotees but also as an indispensable part of Natya or dance-drama. This continued up to the time of Kalidasa of the 4th century or the 5th and later on, the dance-drama form slowly declined and virtually went out of vogue in India. It might have been due, among other things, to the excessive development of its classification with too many restrictive rules and hair-splitting differences in the various kinds of dramas and their meticulous requirements, leaving little discretion and scope for originality for imaginative playwrights and actors. However, during the hey-days of the Gupta period and later times too, the art in its dance-drama form seems to have been carried over to East Asiatic countries like Java and Bali, Cambodia and Siam, where it is still flourishing with local languages and colouring.

All the same, many works on dance and dramaturgy came to be written in successive centuries. In Harshavardhana's time (606-647) '*Ratnavali*' and '*Nagananda*' dramas were produced. *Agni-purana* com-

piled in the 7th century and *Vishnudharmottara* in the 8th century A.D. are valuable works dealing with abhinaya. Abhinava Gupta the Kashmir Saivite and Puritan, who lived between the close of the 10th and the beginning of the 11th century had written an illuminating commentary on Natya Sastra. The *Dasarupa* of Dhananjaya of the last quarter of the same century composed during the reign of a Malwa king, treats of 18 forms of dramatic works with more emphasis on the literary aspect than on histrionics and technique of production and presentation. This work became so popular and authoritative in the field as to supplant all other works in the field including Natya Sastra. *Natya Dharpana* by Ramachandra and Gunachandra, *Bhava prakasanam* by Saradatanaya and *Sangita Ratnakara* by Sarangadeva of the 12th and 13 centuries were other landmarks in the history of production of valuable works on the arts.

In Tamil Nad, during the 1st century A.D. there were powerful kings like Karikala Chola with his capital at Kaviripumattinam and Nedumsezhian the Pandya King at Madura and they gave great encouragement to the fine arts including dance. It was during this period that the incidents relating to Kovalan, Kannaki and Madavi of the later *Silappadikaram* hero and heroines are said to have happened. It was in the 2nd Century A.D. that Chera Senguttavan the Chera King conquered the North, brought a stone from the Himalayas and installed the image of Kannaki—the saintly and dutiful wife of Kovalan. It

was his brother Ilango who wrote the great classic '*Silappadikaram*'. His friend Sithalai Sathanar produced '*Manimekalai*' relating to the story of the daughter of Madhavi. Both contain a great wealth of information about the music and dance of Tamil Nad as they then existed.

The arts had a great impetus under the rule of the Pallavas also, who had Kancheepuram as their capital. They had high development during the 7th and 8th centuries as evidenced by the *Agni Purana* and *Vishnu-dharmottara*. Narasimha Varman among the Pallavas was a great patron of the arts. Parakesari Varma the Pallava-Chola King provided the roof of the Natana Sabha (dancing hall) at Chidambaram with golden tiles. It was chiefly during this period, it is said, that the Tamils began to lose their special or characteristic features and that '*Kulhus*' became '*Natyam*' and '*Innisai*' became '*Sangitam*'. Standard works on them came to be written more and more in Sanskrit. Pallavas loved architecture and sculpture. Building of temples and stone monuments began from this time, e. g. the rock temples of Mahabalipuram or Mamallapuram as it was then called. By and by, it is Bharata Natya that supplied the inspiration for sculpture, painting and iconography. The canons of these arts came to be based on those of Bharata Natya.

Raja Raja the great built the big Brahadeeswara temple at Tanjore in 1003-1007 A.D., and encouraged

music and dance, painting and sculpture. According to an inscription in that temple, he is said to have collected as many as 400 dance artistes, dance masters and accompanists from many parts of the country, given them endowments for their maintenance and established the cultivation of these arts on a firm basis. His son Rajendran who ruled till 1042 A.D. continued the patronage. He extended his conquests far into the North and was a contemporary of King Bhoja of the North who was also a great patron of the arts. It was during this period that Mohammed of Gaznni began his invasions into India from the North West.

After Rajendra, Kulothunga I and II, then Rajarajan II and then Kulothunga III all kept up the patronage for the art unabated till the 1st quarter of the 13th century. It was during the reign of Kulothunga III that the number of dancers and dance-masters in the Tiruvidamaruthur temple was increased considerably. They were given endowments like '*Nattuva Nilai*' and '*Nattuvakkani*'. In addition to women, there were men dancers also. *Sakkaiars* among them were well versed in Tamil, Sanskrit and Alankara Sastras also. Some of the danseuses used to marry too and take the endowments as their stri-dhan a.

Like the Pallavas and Cholas, the Rashtrakutas, the Chanakyars of Kalyani, the Hoysalas of Dwara-samudram and the Kakathiars of Telengana patronis-

ed music and dance. It was during the time of the Rashtrakuta king Krishna that the cave paintings and sculptures of Ellora came into being. Thus up to the end of the 12th century, music and dance flourished under royal patronage in all parts of the country and spread also to East Asiatic countries.

Under Mohammedan invasions in the North from 1100 A.D. and Moslem rule for over five centuries, patronage for the traditional arts declined there. While under such influences of later periods, music got enriched and grew as the glorious Hindustani system, classical dance found itself neglected and died in the North, giving place to the rise of other mixed styles. It is the good fortune of India that the original national and common classical dance tradition was preserved intact and developed with purity and system by sustained patronage from successive generations of kings and nobles in South India and especially in Tamil Nad.

On account of the disturbed conditions in the North many of the artistes and writers took shelter in the kingdoms of the South and continued their work. Sarangadeva the author of Sangita Ratnakara was one such who took office under king Singanna Deva of Daulatabad, in the 13th century. Even in the South, after Kulothunga III, there was a slight setback in the development of the arts as a result of disunity among the kingdoms and the intrusion of the Mohamedans as far as Madura. In the middle of the

14th century, the foundations of the Vijaynagar empire were laid. It came to the zenith of power and glory under Krishnadevaraya (1509-1529). During his reign and that of the Naikers appointed by him, music and dance flourished again all over the South. The rule of the Tanjore Naick kings lasted for about 100 years and then passed into the hands of the Maharattas, except in Madura.

During the time of Achyuthappa Naick, Raghunatha Naick and Vijayaraghavulu Naick (1572-1673), great masters of music and dance flourished under royal patronage. It was the period when '*Sangita Sudha*' by Govinda Dikshitar and '*Chathurdani Prakashika*' by Venkata Makhi were produced. It was the time when the South India Veena came to have fixed frets. It was the time (Vijayaraghavulu's reign) when the great Kshetrappa (an emigrant from Andhra Desa) composed his mellifluous *padas* with over 300 *Nayika-Nayaki bhedas* and contributed to the enrichment of music and abhinaya. It was the time when Thirthanarayana Swami revived the long forgotten classical dance-drama art in Tamil Nad under the name of Bhagavata Mela and composed a number of dance-dramas in Bharata Natya technique.

Under Tulajai among the Mahratta rulers of Tanjore (1763-1787), the patronage for the arts continued as before. He collected artistes from many parts of the country, gave endowments to them and once again established the culture of the arts on a

sure basis. It was during his time that one expert in Bharata Natya, by name Mahadeva Annavi, was brought down from Tinnevely with two well trained women disciples of his and encouraged to give further impetus and refinement to Bharata Natya. Mahadeva Annavi was a gifted composer as well. He composed a Pada-Varna "*Posale Thulajendra Rajah*" and had it danced by his disciples Vanajakshi and Muthumanar so well as to earn the lasting esteem of the ruling king and the learned vidwans of his court. He was given also an endowment of 10 velis of lands. He was a senior contemporary of Dikshitar and Syama Sastry of the Trinity of Carnatic music and closely moved with them. It was the time when Melatur Venkatarama Sastri composed 12 brilliant dance-dramas and brought the Bhagavata Mela art to the height of excellence.

During the rule of Sarfoji (1787-1824) and of Sivaji (1824-1865) further great developments took place in music and dance. Those were the times when Tyagaraja, Dikshitar and Syama Sastri poured out their matchless compositions which brought Carnatic music to the pinnacle of glory. It was then that Chinnayya, Ponnaiah, Vadivelu and Sivanandam the quartet Tanjore brothers completed the process of re-editing the programme of Bharata Natya as it is to-day. In Travancore King Swathi Tirunal was another great patron as well as a musician by himself and he took Vadivelu to his court. The Bharata Natya ballet '*Sarfoji Kuravanji*' seems to have come

into vogue at this time on the model of the Kutrala Kuravanji. The ruling king of Tanjore is said to have admired the Bharata Natya of Chinnayya (though a man) so much that he made arrangements to get other male artistes also trained in it.

Besides Tanjore, Vizianagaram, Bobbili, Pithapuram, Karvetinagar, Ramanathapuram, Ettayyapuram and Travancore also were places where the arts were greatly encouraged and patronised. It may be noted that it is a descendant of the four famous Tanjore Brothers who became reputed as the grand old Meenakshisundaram Pillai of Pandanallur and who preserved the pure traditions in Bharata Natya tenaciously during the depressing times of the latter part of the 19th century and the 1st part of the 20th. From 1865, the whole of Tamil Nad also came under direct British rule and the dark age for Bharata Natya set in. Even during this dark period, there were not wanting a few noteworthy Nattuvanars and Devadasi experts who struggled hard to keep up high traditions in the art though the art by itself lost public esteem and support and came under a cloud of disrepute. By a fortunate circumstance, the State of Baroda alone in the North was patronising Bharata Natya and had an establishment for it.

It is this ancient art of Bharata Natya as has been preserved and cultivated by the Devdasis and Nattuvanars under the sustained patronage of successive kingdoms and royalties through many centuries, that

we have inherited and that has become popular in these days.

The mere fact that it was so preserved in the South only and forgotten in the North cannot make it a mere South Indian regional affair. It is wrong to imagine that Bharata Natya is practised only by South Indians or popular only in the Southern part of the country. Truth and commonsense require that it must come to its own and be recognised again as the most common national and classical dance art of India. It must also be remembered, that while all the other chief styles of Indian dancing grew from their early regional folk art, it was from this common and ancient Natya tradition that they imbibed later some features and developed into their present forms. It is this ancient common tradition again that has been the inspiring source of the allied arts of sculpture, painting and iconography.

II. BHARATA NATYA IN PRACTICE

That which is now widely popular and in vogue as Bharata Natya is only one form of that art. It had been for long in the past known in the South as *Sadir Natya*, or *Sadir Attam* or *Nautch*. The Pundits have always been calling it as *Bharatam*. This and the fact, that the art was found to closely conform to the principles and technique of Bharata Natya Sastra encouraged the pioneers, including the present speaker, who worked hard for the renaissance in it to popularise it justifiably in the generic name of Bharata Natya. It was in the hands of the Devadasis mostly for centuries and has come down to us almost intact as a fascinatingly beautiful form. Its predominating theme has been 'sringara' or love. On account of these, most people came to form a wrong notion, that Bharata Natya was only a solo dance and an exclusive monopoly of women, that man had no place in it and that it could not have any dramatic interest as that of the Kathakali, or *rasas* other than *Sringara*.

Be it noted, that in the first place, 'Sringara' is the most important and dominant among the *rasas* or sentiments of the Hindu Natya conception. All the same, the actual and traditional treatment of that sentiment in Bharata Natya in practice has been so comprehensive as to include within itself or give scope

to and bring out other sentiments as well though in a subsidiary manner. In addition to love lyrics, songs of pure bhakthi or devotion also are used copiously in Bharata Natya programmes. I shall deal with this sentiment of love in Bharata Natya more in detail later.

Be it noted also, that as a matter of fact, Bharata Natya has two other still extant forms namely, the dance-drama of the *Bhagavata Mela* tradition and the *Kuravanji* ballet. Since these two have been revived and brought to public notice only recently, many people may not have known about their existence and importance. Hence correctly viewed, *Bharata Natya is a vast and comprehensive generic system of highly developed classical dance in India, the principles and technique of which are closely applied and applicable to three chief surviving species among others namely, (1) the lyrical solo Sadir Natya of the Nattuva Mela handled in the past mostly by Devadasis and now by respectable family women, (2) the heavy dance-drama of the Tanjore Bhagavata Mela tradition and (3) the lighter Kuravanji Ballet. All these three use only Bharata Natya technique through naturally they may differ in purposes and effect.*

The programme of Bharata Natya (in its solo Sadir Natya form) that is now ordinarily in vogue is said to have been re-edited by the famous quartet brothers—Chinnayya, Ponnayya, Vadivelu and Sivandam the famous Vidwans in Music and Dance who

flourished during the time of King Sarfoji of Tanjore about a hundred years ago. Before their time other items like Kaustubams (or Kavitvams) seem to have been danced. Though there may be some justification to believe the above said re-edition of the programme, one has to be careful about taking in such things as indisputable facts.

Though Bharata Natya is over two thousand years old, it has always been a growing art and had never been static or stagnant. Though its basic ideals and principles had remained practically unchanged, its repertoire and forms of presentation had been changing from time to time to suit the changing tastes and conceptions of artistry. The number of hand gestures seems to have grown and there have been slight changes too in their names, significance and usages. The process of development and refinement of Karnatic music and Bharata Natya had commenced as early as the time of Achyuthappa Naick, King of Tanjore (1572-1614 A.D.) During the time of his successors Raghunatha Naick and Vijayaraghavulu Naick (1614-1673) when the great Venkatamakhi, author of Chaturdandi-prakasika, Kshetravaya and Thirtha Narayana Swami brought out their masterly works and compositions, the fine arts gained a further development.

During the times of Pratapa Simha and his successor Tulajaji (1741-1787 A.D.), the process of development and refinement continued unabated. There is reason to believe that Bharata Natya too benefitted

by that process during these periods. That was the time when the great Melatur Venkatarama Sastri was in the prime of his life and raised the Bhagavata Mela dance-drama to a pinnacle of glory by his masterly compositions. It was then that Mahadeva Annavi loomed as the most honoured Bharata Natya Vidwan of the Tanjore Court and he was a gifted composer and dance master. He is said to have given a new life to the art. Subbaraya Nattuvanar, the father of the later Tanjore Quartet Brothers was another dance master of the time who enjoyed the patronage of the Tanjore Court. These veterans moved closely with Dikshitar and Syama Sastri of musical fame for mutual exchange of ideas, No wonder, like music, Bharata Natya too began to get more and more refined.

That process might have continued during the next generations and the Brothers Chinnayya, Ponnaiah, Vadivelu and Sivanandam, the sons of Subbaraya Nattuvanar might have completed it and given a final shape to the reform of the programme of Bharata-Natya and re-edition of it to the shape that we have to-day. Be that as it may, the object of the re-edition was to bring out *Nrtta* (pure dance), *abhinaya* (gestural and facial expression) and *Nrtya* (expression with some dance) at their best. Strictly speaking, *Nrtya* includes *abhinaya* and if it is given separately here, it is only to emphasise the beauty of *abhinaya* combined with a little dance.

An ordinary programme of Bharata Natya consists

of what are called Allarippu, Jathisvara, Sabdha, Varna, Pada, Tillana and a śloka or verse. That does not mean that these are the only items that can be expounded in Bharata Natya. Any song which can give scope for the exposition of Nṛtta and Nṛtya at their best can be taken up. The significance and purpose of these items have been briefly explained by me as early as 1933 in the chapter on Bharata Natya in my book "Personalities in Present Day Music."

Alarippu is the shortest and simplest item of Barata Natya. It is primarily intended to be an invocatory piece for doing obeisance to the gods and the assembly of onlookers. It is also said to mean the flowering or opening of the body and limbs to get prepared to execute more difficult pieces to be taken up subsequently. Hence it is a short piece with simple poses and movements in an equally simple tune and rhythm. "*Tham-thi-tha Thai-Tha-thai*" are the *sollukkattus* (or rhythmic syllables) that are used therein. It is a piece of three to five minutes' duration. The tendency of some modern dancers to add on to it more and more of difficult adavujathis (dance units) in the name of improvement or novelty does not serve the purpose for which the initial piece is intended and is hence to be deprecated.

The *Jathisvara* is a more difficult item of pure dance (Nṛtta) executed to the tune of a combination of swara passages in a particular raga and tala. The meaning of pure dance is, with the God-given body and

limbs you create as many forms of beauty as possible in poses and movements in rhythm. Being beautiful to look at is its only meaning. It has no mood or sentiment. It produces a kind of aesthetic pleasure. In answer to a question by the sages, Bharatha said, "the dance is occasioned by no specific need ; it has come into use because it creates beauty. As dance is naturally loved by almost all people it is eulogised as being auspicious. It is eulogised also as being the source of amusement on occasions of marriage, child birth, reception of a son-in-law, general festivity and attainment of prosperity." (Natya Sastra— Chap. IV, Verses 267 to 269—Manomohan Ghose's Translation.)

In the third item *Sabdha*, we are introduced for the first time to abhinaya or gestural expression. A *sabdha* means a song in praise of the glory of a God or king. In sanskrit it is called 'yasogiti,' a song praising one's fame. The *sahitya* of a line of the song, will be preceded or followed by a short dance *jathi* with the *sollukkattu*, like 'THA—THANAM—DHIMI.' The song will generally describe and eulogise the qualities, rare deeds and generosity of the hero and end with the words, 'Salamure' (salutation to you). A large number of *sabdhas* had been composed by gifted Vaggeyakars of Melattur village in the Tanjore district.

The *Varna* is the central and the most elaborate and difficult item of a Bharata Natya programme. It is the most scholarly piece-de-resistance seeking to

bring out the best of pure dance and abhinaya alternatively first, and then with a combination of both. It will be testing the training, capacity, skill and stamina of the dancer to a great extent. A series of pure dance sequences will be alternated with abhinaya for almost every line of the song and the whole thing will be taken to a climax wherein Raga, Bhava and Thala will be absolutely synchronised, with the feet showing the jathis in varied and round about gaits, the hands and its hasthas indicating the meaning of the song and facial expression bringing out the varying shades of inner emotion. Swara sequences will be intertwined in the song and rendered in dance followed by abhinaya for the sahitya corresponding to the swaras. It is in the Varna that the most complicated *Angaharas* (dance sequences), with *theermanams* (rhythmic finishes) are executed and abhinaya is elaborately expounded. As such the Varna requires for its proper and full exposition, forty-five minutes to one hour in the hands of experts and creates an impression of beauty, grandeur and profundity.

After the exactingly strenuous physical and mental exercise involved in the Varna an interval of a few minutes will be given for the artiste to take rest and for giving a respite to the audience. The subsequent half of the programme will, in the main, be occupied by smooth sailing and leisurely exposition of abhinaya for a number of *Padas* without dance. A pada is ordinarily a love lyric. The time honoured convention in all these songs has been that the human soul

represented by the lady lover, 'Nayika' yearns for the supreme being, 'Nayaka'. The Padas of Kshetrappa are the best suited for abhinaya in as much as they give immense scope for the expression of variegated sentiments and shades of emotion in leisurely tempo and with exquisite ragabhava.

Lest a number of successive padas should cloy the audience, the vivacious Thillana, an item of pure dance (Nritta) is introduced in between the padas. The thillana is considered the most beautiful piece of dance with a number of alluringly sculpturesque poses and variegated patterns of movements executed with exquisite grace and elegance. Almost every *adavu* (dance unit) is rendered in three tempos to bring out the beauty of poses and scintillating theermanams. The performance ordinarily closes either with abhinaya for a sloka or verse according to tradition or with the 'Natanamadinar' song and dance as per the habit of modern times.

Anybody who witnesses a high class Bharata Natya performance would feel convinced that it is a perfect model of synchronised art, with a combination of many arts and elements of beauty, namely, pure dance patterns of endless variety, significantly symbolic hand gestures, ever changing facial expression, embellishments of neck and eye movements and all in the background of melodious music, vocal and instrumental combined.

At this stage Mr. E. Krishna Iyer gave demonstra-

tions of samples of the various items of an average Bharata Natya programme by himself and also with the assistance of his own daughter Mrs. Meena Viswanath and by Mrs. Saroja wife of Mr. Mohan Khokar.)

Constituents of Bharata Natya in theory & Practice.

Having given you an idea of Bharata Natya in present day practice, I shall now deal with its various constituents and elements of beauty in theory and practice and the significance of some of the technical terms connected with them.

Natya, *Nritya* and *Nritya* are the terms that have been understood first. *Natya* originally meant a *Nataka* or Dance-Drama, i.e. a drama enacted with music, dance and abhinaya. In fact *Natya Sastra* is a treatise on drama as was in practice in ancient India; and music, dance and abhinaya were inseparable parts of the drama. Hence much of what is said in the *Natya Sastra* is in relation to the drama. Such treatment of these various arts continued up to the time of Sarangadeva of the 12th Century. In later times the term *Natya* has come to be used also for dance and abhinaya without drama.

NRTTA is pure dance, the significance and meaning of which I have already explained before. *Nritya* is dancing to music but without a definite theme, meaning or sentiment. It is made up of a series of dance sequences called *Angaharas*. According to *Natya Sastra*, they are 32 in number. Each *Angahara* is a combination of many *Karanas* in Sanskrit or *Adavu*

in Tamil. They are dance units. As per Natya Sastra 2 karanas make one *Matrka* and two or more Matrkas make one Angahara.

Every *KARANA* or *ADAVU* is a combination of three essential elements namely (1) a *STHANA* or pose, (2) a *CARI* or step or foot work and (3) a *NRTTA HASTA* or beauty hand. " The combined (movement of) hands and feet in dance is called the Karana ". (N. S. Chap. iv 30-34). " The Sthanas, the Caris and the Nrtta Hastas mentioned (before) are known as Matrkas the variations of which are called Karanas ". (N. S. Chap. iv 58).

These Karanas are given as 108 in the Natya Sastra. It is these dance units or rather their basic poses that have been immortalised in the sculptures of the Chidambaram temple gate. In course of time, some of these Karanas might have become obsolete or forgotten and new ones might have been evolved and brought into vogue. Anyway according to the Tamil tradition, the Adavus or dance units are said to be 120 in number and they are of 12 classes each with 10 variations. About 70 of them seem to be in vogue in the best of classical schools. Nrtta Hastas are given as 30 in the Natya Sastra. They are different from single and combined hand gestures intended for Abhinaya. In Abhinaya Dharpana they are 13 and not different from single or combined hand gestures.

In classical dance, the terms **TANDAVA** and

LASYA seem to have undergone a change in their significance in common parlance. Tandava is now-a-days ordinarily understood and described as manly, powerful and forceful while Lasya as feminine, gentle and graceful. But according to Natya Sastra all dance with Angaharas was Tandava and its gentler form Lasya was performed by women. "The Class Dance (Tandava) is mostly to accompany the adoration of Gods, but its gentler form (Sukumara-prayoga) relates to the erotic sentiment." (N. S. Chap. IV, 272.) Hence Tandava was no exclusive male dance. It was performed by women also.

According to the foot-work the *adavus* in practice have three basic positions or floor contact of the feet, called *Thattu-Adavu* striking with flat foot, *Nattu-Adavu* with the heel and *Mettu-Adavu* with the toes. Out of these, various combinations are made.

Any way Bharata Natya choreography or dance patterns are unique, not only because of their endless variety but also because of the meticulous synchronisation of sculpturesque poses, foot-work and beauty-hands among other things in every *Adavu* or dance-unit.

NRTYA is dancing that expounds a theme by means of explicit and meaningful gestures. It is abhinaya in rhythm though an exception is made in Bharata Natya programme in interpreting a sloka or verse in abhinaya without rhythm.

Abhinaya is classified as *Angika*, *Vachika*, *Aharya* and *Satvika*. *Angika* abhinaya involves the use of not only significantly symbolic hand gestures but also all parts of the body and limbs classified as *Anga*, *Upanga* and *Pratyanga*. *Natya Sastra* gives *Asamyuta* Hastas (single hand gestures) as 24 and *Samyuta* Hastas (combined hand gestures as 13.) *Abhinaya Dharpana* gives 28 single hands and 23 combined hands. The names of only 22 Hastas are common in both and 13 only are similar in substance in these two works.

In course of time, the Hastas used in abhinaya seem to have grown in numbers and some changes too seem to have taken place in the forms, usage and significance of some of these hastas. In practice, we have now specific hands for relatives, castes, some Gods and Goddesses and the Ten Avatars of Vishnu. Our forefathers in general and especially those of the South seem to have had a flair for splitting and subdividing things to an undue extent and enlarged the number of hastas to an amazing degree. This is evident from the Tamil Work called "*Maha Bharata Choodaman*" written by an unknown author who seems to have flourished about 300 years ago. Its first three chapters deal with *Natya* in extenso under the title of "*Bhava Raga Sangrathi Abhinaya Dharpana Vilasam*," while in the fourth chapter, music is dealt with under the title "*Sangitathi Raga Mela Lakshanam*". The author seems to have undertaken a translation of an earlier work called "*Maha Bharatam*"; and instead of con-

fining himself to that work compared and referred to many other works also and incorporated in his translation, interesting information from as many as 24 other works available to him, including *Natya Sastra*, *Abhinaya Dharpana*, *Silappadikaram*, *Sangita Ratnakaram*, *Adi Bharatam* and *Bharata Sara Sangraham*.

In this Tamil work 'Bharata Choodamani,' *Asamyutha Hastas* are given as 42, *Samyuta* hands as 48 and *Nrtta Hastas* as 30. Besides these, 20 of what are called 'Mudra Hastas' are also given. Mudras are hand gestures relating to and used in *Tantric* rites; and some of these might have got into *Natya* also..

Almost every *Asamyuta Hasta* is given variations or subdivisions. For example, *Pathaka* is divided as *Sankirna Pathaka*, *Slishta Pathaka*, and *Thala Pathaka*. *Ardha Chandra* is divided as *Slishta*, *Yuktha*, *Reka* and *Tala-reka*. *Mukula* is split into *Ardha*, *Slishta*, *Kanda*, *Mushti*, *Madyama*, *Samdamsa* and *Pradesa*. And so on, the single hands had grown from *Bharata's* 24 and *Nandikeswara's* 28 to 42. Under the heading "*Muhurthathi Abhinayam*," hands are given for *Yugas*, *years*, *Solstices*, *seasons*, *months*, *weeks*, *planets* and *Nakshatras* (stars). Under "*Stavarathi Abhinaya*" (*abhinaya* for immovables in creation), the *lokas* (worlds) according to Hindu conception, *Mountains*, *Oceans*, *Rivers*, *Tanks*, *Wells*, *Trees*, *Countries*, *Towns*, *Villages*, *Roads* etc., are indicated by special *Hastas*, *Living water creatures*, *crawling ones*, *flying birds*, and *beasts on the one hand*

and human beings, relations, Devas, Asuras, Rishis and a host of other beings and things are included for abhinaya by separate Hastas. In short the total number of hand gestures and their variations come up to the amazing number of 914 !

It goes without saying that this kind of excessive hairsplitting is too impracticable to be brought into vogue and much of it must have remained as theoretical only. Many of these would be found overlapping and the same idea might have been indicated by variations in hands according to the Matha, text, or school or authority purported to be followed. The *Nattuva Mela* dance Masters are said to follow *Nandi Bharatam* or *Hanumat Bharatam*. The former is evidently Abhinaya Dharpana and I do not know anything about the latter. The number of basic Hastas that are actually in use now-a-days is however limited.

Be these as they may, they indicate how Bharata Natya, inspite of its great antiquity has rarely been static and how thinking minds through the centuries had tried to make necessary changes in it to suit the respective times. Even in the limited number of Abhinaya Hastas that are in use now-a-days, we have a ready made and fairly extensive vocabulary to indicate and interpret objects, ideas and action. Hence these hand gestures, when properly shown as per the convention, bring before the minds of the onlookers, in a split second, the objects, ideas or actions indicated

by them. They are all based on nature though artistically conventionalised and are therefore highly suggestive symbols. Hence their great value and hence the uniqueness of Bharata Natya as an art of supreme suggestion.

The use of conventional poses, gestures and action is called *Natyadharmi* while that of ordinary gestures and action as in ordinary day to day life is *Lokadharmi*. Bharata Natya was only *Natyadharmi* action and there is little place in it for *Lokadharmi* action or movements.

Vachika Abhinaya is expression by words. In the Bhagavata Mela dance-drama in Bharata Natya technique, we have speeches and dialogues to be made by character actors. But in the solo Bharata Natya of the Nattuva Mela tradition, there is no speech but we have music with *sahitya* instead. That can be taken as *Vachika*.

Aharya Abhinaya is costume and make-up. In the Bhagavata Mela, the costume and Make-up is according to the character to be represented. In the Nattuva Mela Sadir Natya, there is no question of character representation or changing costumes. The so-called traditional costume of the former generations of Devadasi artistes in Bharata Natya before the 1930s used to be a hybrid mixture of Muslim pyjamas and Hindu Saree with a jacket for the upper part of the body. Decoration with ornaments from head to foot used to be elaborate. Special attention used to

be paid for the coiffure. A pair of anklets each with a band of about 100 small bronze bells called *Gajjais* used to be worn round the feet. The present speaker, who was on the stage as a dancer in female costume till about 1934, made some improvement in the costume and make-up by so tying the saree as to hide the underpyjamas completely and by reducing the ornaments to a necessary minimum.

However from the late 1930s, a desirable improvement in the costume, so as to make it appear more classical as in some of the ancient sculptures, was brought about and well settled, thanks to the example set by Smt. Rukmini Devi. Ornaments also are worn less now-a-days than in former times, though occasionally we still come across artistes with heavy and cumbersome head-dress and ornaments and nose rings too big for the face and too inconvenient for expression.

The older generation of Devadasis never had make-up with grease paint, face-powder and lip-stick, except for a natural reddening of the lips by chewing pan-supari. Now-a-days, no modern dancer appears on the stage without make-up and some artistes are found to be overpainted. In this connection it may be worth while to remind people of what *Natya Sastra* says about ornaments.

“ Mortals of poor strength (as in the present age) should not make any (undue) physical exertion, and hence it is not desirable that their crowns or ornaments should be made with gold and

jewels." (Chap. XXIII, 203-204). "Hence ornaments are to be made with thin sheets of copper, coloured sheets of mica, Bhenda and bee-wax." (Chap. XXIII, 211).

The purpose of the costume in dance is to set off the body to good advantage in appearance without exposing too much of the body and at the same time to leave the legs and hands free to move without hindrance.

Satvika Abhinaya is the outward expression of the inner temperament or feeling or psychic condition. That condition is called a Temperamental State in *Natya Sastra*, and is caused by the conscious and concentrated mind. Eight such States are given, namely, Paralysis, Perspiration, Horripillation, Change of voice, Trembling, Change of colour, weeping and fainting, each being caused by the concerned feelings like joy, fear, anger, sorrow, shame, surprise etc. This is a very important element of Bharata *Natya*, as fullness of *abhinaya* requires a combination of objects and ideas by hand gestures and of inner shades of feeling or emotion by facial expression among other things.

Rasa and Bhava

This naturally leads us to the question of the purpose of art and the consideration of *Rasa* and *Bhava* in theory and practice. The purpose of art according to the Hindu conception is creating in the mind of the spectator *Aesthetic* pleasure or experience. By formulating this theory and developing it in all its details,

the Indian genius made a unique contribution 2000 years ago to the conception and understanding of Aesthetics and its history, In the words of the French Savant, Professor Sylvian Levi “ *Indian genius produced a new art, which the word Rasa summarises and symbolises and which condenses it in one brief formula ‘ the poet does not express but he suggests.’ ”*

The effect of a dance or dance-drama on a spectator is psychological. The spectator must be enabled to identify himself with the actor or dancer to experience, in ideal form, his emotion and feelings. “ In the course of abhinaya in a play (an epic poem to be visualised or *Drśya Kāvya*) rhythm played an important part ; the rhythmic character conveyed through abhinaya and dance made it suitable for *suggesting* the deepest and most tender emotions tending to evoke Rasa or sentiment in the spectators.” Hence the doctrine of suggestion has been the basis of all Hindu dramas, dance and other arts in India.

The root meaning of the word Abhinaya is *carrying* (something—a play) *towards* the spectator ; and that carrying or representation is suggestive imitation or visualisation of the conditions (physical and mental) of the characters in a drama. The aesthetic significance of such imitation is evoking Rasa in the spectator. The Hindu conception of aesthetic enjoyment is more psychological than sensory. A play or dance must be such as to draw upon the imagination of the spectator also for enjoying it.

Rasa according to *Natya Sastra* is of 8 kinds ; and one more has been added in later times to make them.

9. They are, *Sringara* (Love), *Veera* (Heroic), *Karuna* (Compassion), *Adbhudha* (Wonder), *Bhaya* (Fear), *Hasya* (Humourous), *Bibhatsa* (Aversion), *Raudra* (Furious), and *Santa* (Peace). An idea of these can be had from the illustration given in the following Sloka on Rama :—

“ *Sringaram kshithinandini viharane, Veeram Dhanurbhanjane, Karunyam bali bhojane, Baya-make, Bibhatsam Anyamuke, Raudram Ravana mardhane, Muni jane Santham, Maha Pathuna.* ”

“ Amorous in the sports with the daughter of the Earth (Sita), Heroic in breaking the bow, Compassionate towards (the sinning) crow, Wonderful or miraculous in making mountains stand on the (waters of the) ocean, Laughing at Surpanaka’s face, Fearing sin, Loathing with Aversion to see another’s wife, Angry or Furious in destroying Ravana, In Peace with ascetics, May that effulgence (Rama) protect us. ”

A *Rasa* or Sentiment is said to be the resultant of or produced by a combination of *Bhavas* or states of mind. The root ‘ *Bhavaya* ’ means ‘ to pervade ’. Hence *Bhavas* are so called because through words, gestures and the representation of temperament, they infuse the meaning of the play or dance into the spectators or they cause the sentiments to *pervade* the mind of the spectators.

Bhavas are of three kinds namely, *Vibhavas*, *Anubhavas* and *Vyabhichari* or *Sanchari* bhavas. The dominant State of mind resulting from all these and fully occupying the mind is called *Sthayi-bhava*.

Vibhavas are determinants. Words, gestures and representation of sentiments are determined by them ; *e.g.* Dushyantha meeting Sankuntala in the forests.

Anubhavas are the consequents or the visible effects of deliberate action ; *e.g.* each of the lovers feeling love for the other ; quickly moving eyes, side glances etc., indicating the onset of love.

Vyabhichari or *Sanchari* bhavas are transitory or evanescent emotions that tend only to develop the main sentiment, such as anxiety, disappointment, anger etc. They are helping factors of a fleeting nature, like waves in an ocean taking birth and fading away in it. The root meaning of the word *Vyabhichari* is to move or to go. Hence the *vyabhichari* bhavas are those that move in relation to the sentiments towards different kinds of objects. They may be said to be *chestas* corollary to the determinants and consequents, like a lover pining away in separation. These *Sanchari* bhavas are given in the *Natya Sastra* as 33 in number such as discouragement, weakness, apprehension, envy etc.,

A combination of all the *Vibhavas*, *Anubhavas* and *Sanchari* bhavas kindle the deep seated impression of the dominant State or *Sthayi bhava* (as Love). These *Sthayi* bhavas again are stated to be 8 in variations ;

Love, Laughter, Sorrow, Anger, Energy, Fear, Disgust, add Astonishment. All these tend to the development of particular rasas or sentiments. The distinction between Rasas and Sthayi bhavas is so narrow that they are considered by some as almost the same. Actually it is not so. The Sthayi bhava for Sringara is *Rathi* ; for Vira, Utsah, for Karunaya, Soka ; for Adbhuta, Ascharya ; for Hasya, hasya ; for Bayanaka, Baya ; for Bibatsa, asuya ; for Raudra, Krodha ; for Shanti, indriya nigraha. Rasas, Sthayi bhavas, Vibhavas, Anubhavas and Sancharibhavas may be likened to Kings, Nobles, local officers and menial attendants respectively according to rank and functions.

Thus abhinaya is the most important contributing factor promoting realisation of rasa and hence is the core of Bharata Natya. The evolution of theory of rasa and bhava, which is a successful analysis of the process of realisation of aesthetic pleasure and enjoyment, testifies to the genius of the author of the Natya Sastra. Though there may be something in common between Aristotle's 'Poetics' and Natya Shastra in depicting the function of drama as affording immediate pleasure to the audience, there is very little in the 'Poetics' that would correspond to Bharata's analysis of the realisation of aesthetic pleasure, and his enumeration of the vibhavas, anubhavas and vyabhichari bhavas. The term 'sentiment' in Aristotle means only a mode of forcible expression of ideas.

Bharata Natya in its well known solo lyrical Sadir Natya form has *Sringara* or Love as its sentiment. This *Sringara* has been considered as the most important and comprehensive among all the *rasas*. Because according to Natya Sastra, the Erotic sentiment includes conditions in all other sentiments. Our ancients never tabooed sex love as something unclean or undesirable. The Hindu mode of life insisted upon *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kama* and *Moksha* as the four aims of life and stages of its course and one had to undergo normal sex experience in a decent manner before he could aspire for salvation, except in very rare cases. Hence our ancients meticulously analysed all sex complexes and emotions and the nature of men and women having them and utilised them for art purposes, taking care to sublimate love as that of the human soul to the supreme soul. Thus the *Nayika-Nayaka* bhava mode of abhinaya arose.

By this process women as *nayikas* or lovers and men as *Nayakas* or the beloved have been classified under various heads according to their respective nature and mental condition. Women are ordinarily classified as *Sveeya*, *Purakeeya* and *Samanya* and each one of these classes has got its own subdivisions. All these are grouped further under eight categories; *Swadhinapathika*, *Vasakasajjitha*, *Viraholthkanditha*, *Vipralabha*, *Kanditha*, *Kalahantharitha*, *Proshitha-bharthrika*, and *Abhisarika*, and then again under three categories; namely *Utthama*, *Madhyama* and *Adhama*. *Nayakas* are classified as, *Pathi*, *Upapathi* and

Vaisikan and again as *Anukulan*, *Dakshinan*, *Dhrishtan* and *Chatan*. *Sringara Rasa* itself is subdivided as *Vipralambha*, and *Sambhoga* and these two are further subdivided. Thus there are on the whole over 300 *Nayika-Nayaka* *bhedas* or variations according to their respective situations and mental conditions in love. Their different emotions and states of mind are beautifully exemplified in the numerous *pada* compositions of *Kshetravya*. Hence a study and practice of these *padas* is essential for effective exposition of *abhinaya*. So also are the *Ashtapadis* of *Jayadeva*.

Background Music. Any exposition of good *Bharata Natya* requires good background music. It ordinarily consists of the *Nattuvangam* music of the dance master, the supporting vocal music of a good-voiced singer, a *Flute*, a *Mridangam*, a *Violin*, a *Thambura* for *sruthi* and *Jalars* to indicate the *tala*. In the distant past, the *Mukha-Vina* a smaller edition of the *Nagaswaram* was in vogue. In the place of the *Tambura* and *Mukha-vina*, the *bag-pipe* and *clarionet* came in and persisted for a long time. Now-a-days a *sruthi* box for the drone and a *flute* and a *violin* for accompaniments along with a *mridangam* and *jalars* are ordinarily used, though the *clarionet* still persists in some quarters. In former generations, the *Nattuvanar*, his supporting vocalist and the accompanists all used to walk up and down the stage close behind the dancer, with their music often keyed to a high pitch and rather vociferous too. Now-a-days they are

made to sit on the right wing of the stage and their music too is comparatively mellowed, though not melliflous in all cases.

Languages used in dance :—Bharata Natya employs three or four kinds of languages, namely, the *Sahitya* or words of the songs, the *swaras*, the *sollukattus* and other symbolic syllables for the purpose of practice. The *Sollukattus* are rhythmic syllables indicating the dance units and combinations. Strictly speaking, they are intended only for the guidance of the dancer on the stage and not for the ears of the audience. If they are still part and parcel of the *Nattuvangam* (dance direction) of the dance master, they must have been originally intended to be sung in *sruthi* and *ragabhava* to sound as other kinds of enjoyable music having *sahitya* and *swara*. In the Bhagavata Mela Dance-Drama, all *sollukattus* are sung in tune with *sruthi* in the upper *Shadja* and in the Kuchupudi tradition they are sung with *ragabhava* too! If on the contrary the *sollukattus* in Bharata Natya are sung like *Konnakole* like words of ordinary speech, it must be due to the deterioration of a former pleasingly sound tradition.

Talas :—The *Talas* or time-measures that are commonly used in Bharata Natya are: *Tisra*, *Rupaka*, *Chaturasra* or *Adi Tala*, and *Misra* or *Chapu*, of 3, 6, 8, and 7 *Aksharas* respectively. The *Ata Tal* of 14 *Aksharas* and *Jampa* of 10 *Aksharas* are occasionally used. (All these were illustrated by suitable songs and dances by Mr. Krishna Iyer himself assisted by

his daughter Mrs. Meena Viswanath and Mrs. Saroja Khokar)

Telling precision in rhythm and arresting *Angasuddha* in the positions and usages of the hands are the *sine-qua-non* of any efficient Nr̥tta in Bharata Natya. Angasuddha process involves not only correcting the position and usages of the hands but also smoothening and polishing every pose and movement with grace and elegance and adding on embellishments of the neck and eye movements. The horizontal neck glides are called *Sundari-griva* (of *Griva-Rechaka*) and they have to be practised with patience. In olden times, each Devadasi artiste used to be trained in rhythmic technique for 3 years, in angasuddha for another 2 years and in abhinaya for a further period of 2 to 3 years.

Thus even a genius in dance with inborn talents for the art had to undergo training for 7 to 8 years before she made her debut on the stage for presenting a full and wholesome picture of the art. According to Silappadikaram, the great Tamil Classic, a girl began her training at the age of five and came out on the stage at the age of 12 or 13 after a 7 or 8 year course of training. Special exercises and massages are prescribed in the Natya Sastra for making the body and limbs supple and graceful. In Western ballet also which is as difficult as Bharata Natya, an eight years' course is prescribed to turn out an appreciable ballerina. If much of the art of present

day Bharata Natya is truncated and inefficient, it is because of too hurried and indifferent training leading to the want of sufficient grip over the technique and artistry in presentation.

In interpreting a song in abhinaya, the whole significance of the song must be had in mind and not merely the literal interpretation word by word and lively imagination and intelligence too must be used to express varying shades of sentiment and emotion in a delicate and *suggestive* manner. The interpretation should not be merely *Padartha-abhinaya*. It should be *Bhava-Abhinaya* also. All these require proper age, sufficient and efficient practice and also experience and understanding of life to some extent on the part of the artiste. Hence children of tender ages cannot expound Bharata Natya in a satisfactory manner. In fact Babyhood and Bharata Natya are a contradiction in terms. The art is intended only for girls who have developed into womanhood. Though childhood is the proper period for getting trained in the art so as to get the necessary suppleness of body and limbs, coming out on the stage for public exposition of the art must be only after the girl becomes a young woman. The very description of a danseuse as given by Bharata and Nandikeswara makes it explicit. The present day habit of some parents bringing out their children below 12 years of age for public exposition of Bharata Natya and making them move about as dolls, is reprehensible as it does harm not only to the art but also to the children themselves.

(The characteristic Adavu Jathis and the way in which these are combined in the items of a dance programme and also abhinaya for a number of padas were demonstrated by Mr. E. Krishna Iyer assisted by his daughter Mrs. Meena Viswanath on the one hand and by Mrs. Mohan Khokar on the other. Mr. Krishna Iyer demonstrated also the right and wrong methods of executing dance and abhinaya by suitable illustrations.).

Bharata Natya has been conceived of by our ancients and is universally admired also as the supreme art of suggestion. Hence to give a full and wholesome picture of that art as it was, as it can be and as it ought to be, the various elements of beauty indicated above, have to be mastered thoroughly ; and the whole art has to be expounded with appreciable suppleness of body and limbs and facial features, telling rhythmic precision, *Angasuddha* (correct position and usage of the hands) and kaleidoscopic choreography with clearness of dance designs on the one hand and convincing abhinaya with gestural and facial expression on the other, and also with over-all pose-perfection, *Soushtava* (grace and elegance), softness and smoothness, suggestive restraint and dignity. Nothing should be over-done to the point of realism. Violent jerks, leaps and bounds and such like movements have no place in Bharata Natya ; and even the most difficult or complicated rhythmic technique and passionate expression have to be executed with nonchalant ease, grace and

restraint and without the exhibition of hard thumping effort. In short, *Bharata Natya without grace and elegance is no Bharata Natya*. Any prevailing misconception contrary to it is due to the bad or indifferent exposition of it by ill trained dancers obsessed with wrong notions about it and spurious over-publicity given to them. Natya Sastra says in chapter XI Verses 88-91: "*Those performing the exercise (in Angaharas) should take care of the Saustava, for the limbs without it (Soushtava) create no beauty (lit. do not shine) in drama or dance.*" (M. Ghose's translation).

While perfection in technique is a *sine-qua-non* for all classical art, neither boringly obtrusive technique, nor exhibitionism of effort by itself in the name of high efficiency or classical purity can be passed off as real art. Truly classical art must have a happy blend of both technical excellence and enjoyable entertainment value so as to please both the knowing pundits and the uninitiated laymen. While the pundits will understand and appreciate the technical points, the laymen will enjoy the over-all outward beauty. This is as true of Bharata Natya as of any other classical art. At the same time one must caution against overdoing the grace part of the art to the point of sacrificing correctness, crispness and clearness of design in dance patterns and convincing expression in abhinaya. What grace is put in, has to be *pertinent to the art*.

Let us take note also of what Bharata says about

the effect of art on the spectator and whose opinion should count in that matter. "A mimicry of the exploits of the Gods, sages, kings as well as of the householders in this world is called the drama" (N. S. Chap. XXVI-123). "The drama succeeds—*when it is approved of by the people*. Hence the people are considered as the authority on the drama." (Chap. XXVI-119-120). "Rules regarding the feelings and activities of the word movable as well as immovable cannot be formulated exhaustively by the Sastra. The people have different dispositions and on their dispositions the drama rests. Hence playwrights and producers should take the people as their authority (as regards the rules of the art (Chap. XXVI-125, 126). "He who attains gladness on seeing a person (actor-dancer) glad and sorrow on seeing him sorry and feels miserable on seeing him miserable, is considered fit to be a spectator in a drama. (Chap. XXVII-54).

Though Bharata applies these tests to dramas in the main, they can be applied to dance especially Bharata Natya, as well. Because that art in practice has many dramatic forms too even at the present day like the Bhagavata Mela and Kuravanji. They can be applied to solo Bharata Natya dance without drama too to some extent, because it has an inherent dramatic element, as it reflects human nature, its acts and emotions in all sorts of situations and seeks to bring about rasa-realisation.

Be it noted here, that Bharata Natya is a theatre or stage art and intended to be seen by others. Unlike music it is not a chamber art. You can shut yourself in your room alone and sing to your heart's content in devotion. But the dancer must have the presence at least of a Nattuvanar, one or two singers and some accompanists also to practise or expound her art. The dance is a highly visual art intended to be seen by others—the spectators (*prekshakas*). Any dance must be capable of pleasing the spectators though they may be of different ages, temperaments and tastes. Natya Sastra says also that no play (or dance) can be absolutely free from faults and these faults should not be made much of. In short, the spectator and critic must be sympathetic.

In this connection the notes given by Manmohan Ghose in his introduction to the translation of NATYA SASTRA may be of interest and value. Says he:—

“The varying tastes of individual spectators were taken into consideration by the author of Natya Sastra when he formulated his theory of success.... The divine success seems to be related to the deeper aspects of a play and came from the spectators of a superior order, i. e. persons possessed of culture and education; and the human success related to its superficial aspects and came from the average spectators who were ordinary human beings. It is from these latter who are liable to give expression to their enjoyment or disapproval in the clearest and the most

energetic manner, that tumultuous applause and similar acts proceeded, while the spectators of the superior order gave their appreciation of the deeper and the more subtle aspects of a play. During the medieval times, the approval of the spectators of the latter kind came to be considered as appreciation *par excellence* and preoccupied the minds of experts and learned critics. But in spite of later development of this aspect of dramatic criticism, it never became the preserve of specialists or scholars. Critics never forgot that the drama was basically a social amusement and as such depended a great deal for its success on the average spectator. Even the Natya Sastra has more than once very clearly said, *that the ultimate court of appeal concerning the dramatic practice was the people.* Hence a fixed set of rules, be it of the Natya Veda or Natya Sastra was never considered enough for regulating the criticism of a performance. This seems to be the reason why special Assessors appointed to judge the different kinds of action occurring in a play decided *in co-operation with the select spectators*, who among the contestants deserved to be rewarded."

What is said about a drama can equally be said of a dance. Whatever be the rigidity of the classical technique and its rules and conventions and the requirements of conformity to them, there will always be a sense of artistry special to a genius which will transcend technique though conforming to it and make itself by all people so as to be easily enjoyed

by them. That is technique plus natural grace, embellishments and entertainment value of a high order. Hence I am bold enough to repeat, that any true and high classical Bharata Natya must be such as to please both the *pundits* and *pamoras*. It is a wrong notion that high and pure classical art can be appreciated only by a small coterie of so-called informed people and is intended only for them and cannot be appreciated by the other mass of spectators, or any Bharata Natya that pleases the masses also must necessarily be unclassical. This wrong attitude is obviously that of certain high-brow snobs, with half baked knowledge, who affect high tastes and understanding and who often profess to understand and appreciate the art of their favourites with boring technique and little grace and entertainment value as highly classical and decry all others' art of an engaging quality as unclassical. Proper understanding and development of the dance art and especially Bharata Natya and discerning patronage for it should avoid this kind of harmful attitude.

The Theatre

I shall now close with a few remarks about the theatre required for dance. Bharata Natya is essentially a highly dignified stage art. Hence it requires a theatre, and has always been intended to be exhibited only therein amidst respectable surroundings. Natya Sastra mentions various kinds of theatres with different measurements and shapes. But it has pres-

cribed, as the most suitable for mortals, only one kind of oblong theatre 96 feet long and 48 feet wide. The back portion of this structure measuring $12' \times 48'$ is to be used as *Nepathya* or back stage or green room, the middle portion of equal proportions for acting and dancing and the front portion $72' \times 48'$ as auditorium for various classes of people from kings and nobles to ordinary folk.

The *Silappadikaram*, the Tamil classic, of the 2nd century A. D. has prescribed a stage of about 32 feet in width and 36 feet in width. The height of the stage platform is to be about $4\frac{1}{2}$ feet from the ground and the ceiling is to be 18 feet above the stage platform and decorated with cloth and pearls. 3 kinds of curtains also are prescribed. *Orumuka Ezhuni* (draw curtain pulled from one side), *Porumukavezhuni* (two draw curtains drawn from both sides and joined in the middle) and *Karandhuvaral Ezhuni* (drop curtain rolled up and down). All these show, how our ancients whether in the North or in the South, have paid due attention not only to the technique of the art in dance and abhinaya but also to production and presentation and other stage craft.

Though a dance-drama may require a large stage nowadays, a dance like Bharata Natya requires a stage platform of at least 30 feet in width and 25 feet in depth with back and front curtains and sidings all in blue decor. In olden days big oil lamps used to provide lighting for the stage. The *Silappadi-*

karam prescribed that the lamps on the side wings must be so placed as not to cast any shadows on the stage. Nowadays electric lights have come. No doubt they give brighter lighting than the old oil lamps. While change of colour in lighting may be desirable in dance-dramas to be in tune with the changing moods of the various scenes, such change of lighting in too frequent a manner is unsuitable or uncalled for in an exhibition of Bharata Natya. The present day craze for frequent change of lighting during the exhibition of this art in particular actually interferes with the enjoyment of the show especially in the abhinaya portion. Uniform mellow lighting to enable the spectators to see clearly the dance designs and changes of gestural and facial expression exhibited by the artiste will do.

Even the front row of the audience should not be too near the stage and the dancer. Dance witnessed from a reasonable distance adds more charm and dignity to the art. Exhibition of this art in marriage parties of former decadent times, executed on the floor in the midst of a motley crowd all around with a narrow passage only for the dancer to move about has been a contributory cause to its downfall. In short Bharata Natya is a high and courtly Goddess to be seen and treated with reverence at a distance in a calm atmosphere with dignified, orderly and clean surroundings.

III. CLASSICAL DANCE-DRAMA OF SOUTH INDIA IN BHARATA NATYA TECHNIQUE

The classical dance-drama form of Bharata Natya in Tamil Nad had been in prominent vogue as a delectable art till three or four decades ago in some of the villages round about Tanjore, like Melattur, Soolamangalam, Oothukad, Saliyamangalam, Nallur and Theperumanallur. Though nowadays it is in an attenuated stage, the tradition is still carried on in the first mentioned village, year after year, in connection with its local temple festival, in the months of May and June. In the other villages, it is more or less defunct, except perhaps as a formal ceremony. The dance-dramas enacted in them were all composed by the illustrious Venkatarama Shastry of Melattur who lived about 150 years ago. Of them 'Prahlada,' 'Markandeya,' 'Usha', and, 'Harishchandra' are now the four favourite plays common to all the villages and they are masterly creations noted for their high diction and artistry. Besides these, the author had composed eight other dramas also namely, 'Rakmangada' 'Gollabhama ;' 'Sita Kalyanam,' 'Rukmini Kalyanam', 'Dhruva', 'Kamsavadha,' 'Sivarathri Vaibhavam' and 'BhasmasuraVadham'.

These dance-dramas are expounded with music of high class Carnatic tradition, dance and abhinaya in

Bharata Natya technique, poetic speeches and dialogues and appropriate dramatic action. The sentiments of the songs and speeches are of varied interest with devotion and philosophic truths permeating all through. *Dharus* (resembling the longer *kritis*) couplets, duets and verses are the various forms of musical composition employed. These along with poetic soliloquies and dialogues blend with dance and *abhinaya* at every stage. The interpretation of song and speech with significant hand-gestures and facial expression coincide with rhythmic cadences of the feet, while intermittent *Svara* passages and corresponding *Nrtta* or pure dance sequences in excellent choreography punctuate some of the songs in a scintillating manner. Background music is supplied by a chorus of musicians who sing and do the *nattuvangam* also (giving the combinations of rhythmic syllables) in tune with the *sruthi*.

Such remarkable synchronisation of music, speech, dance and *abhinaya* produces a high aesthetic appeal. The written and spoken words of the song and speech are lifted from the audible to the visible plane. In short 'The *Sravya Kavya* becomes the *Drishya Kavya*' as per the ideal of the ancient Bharata Sastra. No wonder, the 2000 year old Bharata's Natya tradition can be said to still live in these dance-dramas of Tamil-Nad.

In the words of the scholar Mr. K. V. Ramchandran
 " Though verse seeks a composite expression in unison

with the fully developed arts of music and dance in the drama, it is dance which triumphs and dominates dance in its infinite variety as a decorative unit that twines in and out of every speech and song as the bias and supreme resource of abhinaya, dance that conditions everything from the simplest courtesy to the most elaborate ritual and helps to recapture the epic atmosphere of the stories." The high tension is occasionally relieved by comic interludes.

The Bhagavata Mela dance-drama of Tamil Nad resembles Kathakali of Malabar in being all-night shows without the stage settings of modern dramas and in having such features as ' Patra-pravesam ' or introduction of the chief characters of the play with song and dance. But the two differ in other aspects. The abhinaya of Kathakali, though rich and vivaciously exuberant too, differs in many aspects from that of traditional Natya Sastra, which is closely followed in the Bhagavata Mela shows. The actor-dancers in the former do not speak or sing but expound their abhinaya only mutely to the accompaniment of background music. In the Bhagavata Mela the dancers speak and sometimes sing also. While the Maddalam (drum) is the dominant feature in the music of Kathakali dances, there is a blend of vocal and instrumental music with many accompaniments like the flute, the violin and the mridangam in the Bhagavata Mela dances. In its costume and style of dance and abhinaya, the Kathakali smacks somewhat of the eeriness of the earlier folk art, from which it has

developed. The Tamil Nad dance-drama is more refined with '*soushtava*' (grace and elegance). The predominance of masculine vigour with fierce passions and thrilling realism characterise the Kathakali as an art of dynamic energy. In contrast to it, the Bhagavata Mela dance-drama is subdued and more graceful with the characteristically suggestive gesture-language in abhinaya and highly artistic designs in dance, eschewing realism as per the conception of Bharata Sastra.

Considering the music of these dance-dramas alone, Venkatarama Sastry's compositions deserve special attention. He was a senior contemporary of Saint Tyagaraja belonging to the golden age of Carnatic music. Some of the songs in the dance-dramas of the former are of as high an order as those of the latter. For example, Hiranya-Kasipu's entrance dharu '*Vedale Nama Hiranya*' in Devagandhari raga closely resembles Tyagaraja's '*Evaru manaku samanamu*' kriti in the same raga. Prahlada's entrance song '*Praladhudu*' in Bhairavi raga sounds almost like Tyagaraja's '*Upacharamu*' kriti in the same raga. But the two great composers never copied from each other. Both were remarkable geniuses and master-composers. Hence in estimating the development of Carnatic Music in its golden age of the 18th and 19th centuries, one has to take into account not only the contributions of the famous Trinity, Tyagaraja, Dikshitar and Syama Sastri but also that of other composers like Venkata-

rama Sastry of Melattur.

As Telugu had been court language in Tamil Nad from the time of Vijayanagar kings down to the time of the Maharatta princes of Tanjore, the Bhagavata Mela dance-dramas also had been composed in that language. Character roles in these dramas had been the properties of particular families, inherited from generation to generation. As such the art had been a part of the lives of the people in these villages.

Though the extant dance-dramas of Tamil Nad are those composed 150 years ago by Venkatarama Sastry, the Bhagavata Mela tradition had been in existence long before his time. All fine arts in India had been conceived of, from ancient times, as a means of expounding 'Bhakthi' or devotion to God for spiritual realisation. Even from the 9th century, temples in India had their own theatres and devout artistes exhibited their arts in music, dance and abhinaya as offerings to God as part of their worship. Troupes of Brahmins are said to have offered operatic performances in those temples. Patronage under the Chola and Vijayanagar kings and under later rulers too contributed to the growth and development of dance-dramas. The origin and growth of the present beautiful village of Melattur, the birth-place of Venkatarama Sastry and Natesa Iyer, can be cited as evidence for it. It is said to have risen from the settlement of 500 Brahmin families, with

gifts of 500 shares, each consisting of lands, a house and a well therein, during the time of King Achuthappa Naick of Tanjore for the purpose of keeping up and developing the arts including the dance-drama.

About three hundred years ago Thirtha Narayana Swami the author of 'Krishna Lila Tharangini', who lived in Varahur, was one such devout artiste and he composed a number of dance-dramas in Telugu like 'Parijathaharanam' and 'Rukmangadaha' and also some Pada-Varnas. Long after him, Venkatrama Sastry's father Gopala Krishna Sastry also had composed some dance-dramas like 'Dhruva', 'Gouri', 'Sitakalyanam' and 'Rukminikalyanam'. Manuscripts of these plays are said to be found still in some of the villages.

While later day saints like Tyagaraja were content with music itself as a means of devotion, others of a former age like Thirtha Narayana did not consider it enough, but were convinced, that along with music, expression of sentiments and emotion through dance and abhinaya also was necessary for perfect devotion. Reference to this concept is to be found in his 'Lila Tharangini' songs. He followed closely the tenets and modes of Bhakthi as exemplified in the Bhagavata lore and he composed his songs and dance-dramas accordingly. He found perfect devotion in the exposition of Puranic stories with music, dance and abhinaya in Bharata Natya technique. Those who sang the praise of God and expounded bhakthi

through such media and kalakshepams came to be called ' Bhagavatars ' and the dance-dramas enacted by them as ' Bhagavata Mela Natakas '.

Venkatrama Sastry and his father followed the tenets of Thirtha Narayana and composed their own dance-dramas in that line, improving the tradition to suit their own times. As the object of playing these dramas was devotion to God, the practice of presenting them before temples only came into vogue. Conceptions like ' Art for art's sake ', or art for earning one's livelihood or art as a pleasant pastime had no place in that tradition and it is so even to-day. Nonetheless, what art was exhibited before God, had to be of high aesthetic value as well, without which no God would be pleased. Hence high technique and perfect mastery thereof was made a *sine qua non* in the exposition of these arts. Though nowadays religious faith and devotional aspect may not have as much importance to connoisseurs of art as before, one cannot but be struck by the high aesthetic value and appeal of these dance-dramas. Hence their usefulness and importance even to-day-

It is true, that the present day standard of these dance-dramas in the Tanjore villages is not what it was during the hey-day of former generations of master-artistes. While the dancers of former times lived in their own villages and cultivated the art with patience and care, economic circumstances have forced their descendants to eke out their livelihood

in outside towns and cities, leaving little time or opportunity to keep up their practice of the art in good condition. Most of them return to their villages only on the eve of the annual festivals and with what little practice they might have had and without much of necessary over-all rehearsals, they play their parts as best as they can in a devotional mood. Hence the present day shows suffer from many avoidable defects.

All the same, from what I saw at Soolamangalam in 1950 and at Melattur in the succeeding four years, I could not but be struck by the high conception of the art and its underlying technique in music, dance and abhinaya. In spite of present day general deterioration in the standard of the shows, high class music still remains intact. Most of the members of the orchestra supplying background music happen to be well trained musicians and they sing well and do the nattuvangam also in an enjoyable manner. After seeing their shows, one is convinced, that if reconditioned and developed to suit modern times, the classical dance-drama of Tamil Nad can be made attractive and popular, as it was done in the case of Sadir-nautch and Kathakali which were also in a deteriorated state three decades ago.

Anyway, an effective revival of these dance-dramas can help to remove prevailing misconceptions about Bharata Natya and add one more rich variety to existing dance systems of India, while at the same

time it can supply such material for the evolution of newer forms of dance-dramas and ballets. It is up to all lovers of Indian dance art to note these things and utilise the still surviving tradition and its exponents to best advantage.

IV KURAVANJI BALLET

In between the solo lyrical Sadir Natya of the Nattuva Mela type and the heavy dance-drama of the Bhagavata Mela type, there has been in extensive vogue in Tamil Nad, a ballet form of Bharata Natya too, called the *Kuravanji*. Its theme is a short story. A heroine is in love pangs, having a vague idea of her Lord and yearning all the same for union with him. Her maids try in vain to assuage her feelings. A gypsy woman in her wanderings comes in the way, reads the palm of the love-sick heroine, foretells the attainment by the latter of her cherished desire and goes away at the call of her gypsy husband who comes in search of her. The theme being light is only an excuse or coat stand to hang on and expound a large amount of dances and abhinaya. As it involves a number of characters, it has dramatic interest. The gypsy woman is the real heroine of the ballet and there is scope for dance in light vein with lilting tunes and rhythms. There have been more than 20 such kuravanjis in vogue beginning with the renowned *Kutrala Kuravanji*. The hero in most of these ballets is the presiding deity of the temple and the lady-lover is his would be Consort. In a few ballets like Sarfoji Kuravanji the king is the hero. Many of the songs of the heroine and her maids will give copious descriptions of the valour and exploits of the

hero and the grandeur of his royal processions while those of the gypsy woman will glorify the natural beauty of mountains, rivers, forests and other lucious scenery of her region. These ballets used to be danced in temples and they became defunct for a time before the 1930s in the general decline of all fine arts as a consequence of deep set foreign rule. Kuttrala Kuravanji and Sarfoji Kuravanji have been revived and the Viralimali Kuravanji is sought to be revived along with others too.

Other Forms of Bharata Natya

Besides these three now well known forms of Bharata Natya, many others too seem to have been in vogue in the temples of Tamil Nadu in former times. One of them is *Navasandhi*, small pieces of dance (Nṛtta) expounded as a part of the ceremonies connected with the *Dwajarahana* (or flag-hoisting) at the commencement of temple festivals, to propitiate nine concerned minor deities. Some attempt is now being made to revive it.

From inscriptions we gather, that in the Thirvengaivoyal village, *Santhikuthu* was performed in nine *angas* (parts) during certain festivals. In the Tiruvatiyur temple near Madras, *Ahamargam*, *Chindu*, *Varikolam* and *Chokkam* were danced. The temple in Thirukazhikunram had a dance-drama called *Suraguru Natakam* and that in Pattamadai in the Tinnevely District had *Tiru Natakam*. In an inscription of the 9th year of Raja I, it is said that arrange-

ments were made for dancing the seven *angas* of *Aryakuthu* in the Purattasi festival. Almost every temple in Tamil Nad had its establishment of Devdasis Nattuvanars and accompanists employed for the purpose of cultivating the arts and expounding them on festival occasions, apart from the daily offering of music and dance as part of the worship. The dancing women were called '*Talacheri Pendugal*', '*Pathiyilar*', '*Idipathaliyilar*', '*Devaradiyal*', '*Thalaikoli*' etc. All these artistes were provided with endowments of lands and houses for their maintenance.

Ancient dances of Tamil Nad

From time immemorial, the land of the Tamils had been nurturing a plethora of both classical and folk dances. According to the great Tamil Classic Silappadikaram and other Tamil works, they were generally called *Kuthus* and were classified into *Aha Kuthus* and *Pura Kuthus*. *Aha Kuthu* dealt with love themes while *Purakuthu* treated of war. Eleven kinds of *Kuthus* are said to have been in vogue in ancient times.

They were :—

- (1) *Alliyam*: Lord Krishna killing the royal elephant Kuvalayapada in Kamsa's court.
- (2) *Kudam*: Lord Krishna going in disguise to Bana's city and dancing with a decorated mut pot in his hands.

- (3) *Pavai* : Vishnu as a beautiful girl charmed the hearts of the Asuras.
- (4) *Kodukotti* : Siva destroying the three Asura brothers and dancing fiercely with Bhairavi his consort keeping time.
- (5) *Pandurangam* : Siva with the ashes of the crematorium dancing after the destruction of the Tripura Asuras.
- (6) *Kudai* , Skanda dancing with an umbrella in disdain and merriment at the discomfiture of the Asuras.
- (7) *Thudi* . Skanda killing the Asuras on the waves and dancing victory with his ' *Thudi* ' keeping time.
- (8) *Pedi* . Kama and Paradyumna going to Bana's city and dancing in the guise of women in the streets to release the latter's son.
- (9) *Marukkal* : Mahadevi sister of Vishnu with legs of wood danced in the field of battle killing serpents etc., the forms assumed by Asuras in their fight against Siva.
- (10) *Mal* : Krishna wrestling with Banasura.
- (11) *Kadayam* : Indrani a girl danced last in Bana's city.

Besides these the Tamils had group dances like *Ayar Kuthu* (by shepherds), *Kuravai Kuthu* (by Kuravars) and *Veduvar Kuthu* (by hunters).

V. FOLK DANCES OF TAMIL NAD

Every country in the world has its own variety of folk dances. Even in civilised nations wherein highly developed classical and modern dances with complicated technique are to be found, folk dance and music also play an important part in the life of the people, because while the former can cater only to the artistic taste and needs of a few, the latter are a matter of necessity to the masses at large. In short the latter have been from time immemorial the uainstay of the cultural pastime of the vast masses of people. India is no exception to the rule. From the earliest times a rich variety of folk dances has been in vogue in almost all parts of India. Classical and folk arts have always been influencing each other and some of the chief systems of classical dance in our country have been developed in their present forms from folk art.

Whatever may be the nature of art, whether classical or of the folk type, and though both types have been used for secular and social purposes, all dances have been intended and utilised in India not merely for serving as a cultural pastime but also for refining and ennobling humanity by inculcating into the minds of the masses at large an abid-

ing faith in and love of God, a sense of beauty and good conduct in life. So much so, irrespective of their nature and quality, folk dances in India have always had a spiritual purpose and religious background and through them the fundamental principles and philosophic truths of the dominant religions in our country have been enabled to permeate into the minds of the masses. At the same time they have been the most convenient means of reflecting the community life and beliefs, the social customs and manners and the hopes and aspirations of the people at large. Unsophisticated, simplicity, spontaneity and gaiety are the chief characteristics of folk arts.

Though few countries had been so rich as India from the earliest times in the number and variety of folk dances, nowhere else in India perhaps have more arts been forgotten or neglected than remembered or preserved in good condition. It is due partly to the ever growing exodus of people from the villages to towns leaving aside their time-honoured, simple and healthy art practices and customs and partly to the baneful effects of erstwhile foreign rule and exotic education which brought in a tendency among our so-called educated gentry to look down upon most things Indian and particularly village folk arts, as crude, uncivilised and inferior. The neglect of these precious arts has perhaps been a bit too pronounced in South India. Yet the vitality of some of these arts with their religious and spiritual background has been so great as to enable them to

survive even to-day though struggling for recognition and encouragement. Moreover the influence of highly developed Carnatic Music and Bharata Natya has been so profound and all pervasive in South India, as to bring in a tendency to over-refine some of the extent folk arts and to limit more and more the circles of their cultivation. Thanks to the foresight and pioneering efforts of a few patriotic Connoisseurs, not only the classical dance systems of India but also the folk arts had been revived even during the last stages of foreign rule and some of them are now popular.

The numerous types of the folk dances of Tamil Nad can be grouped under three classes for convenient study, (1) Community group dances among all classes of people high and low for social and religious purposes, (2) dances by professional troupes and (3) dances of the hill tribes and aboriginals.

Among the Community dances, the *Kummi* and *Kolattamme* come first to the mind as the most common and attractive types of folk art. They have been in extensive vogue in the villages all over Tamil Nad in family and social festivals and in temple festivals too. They are done mostly by girls and young women though in some parts men also are found to take to them. They are generally danced around a tall brass lamp or picture or image of Lord Krishna. The women sing while they dance in various rhythmic patterns. The tunes, rhythms and move-

ments employed therein are simple, but varied, graceful and attractive. The songs give out ideas and sentiments of poetic beauty and expound a large variety of themes ranging from the simple joy of the spring season, fertility, good harvest and description of nature, to flower picking, romance of love, praise of Gods, Goddesses, heroes and heroines and philosophic truths. These dances involve a variety of lilting gaits and bends, turns and swings and skips and hops of the body and limbs. The movements of the hands single and double, with beats and claps correspond to the different foot-steps and the dexterous gyrations of the group in kaleidoscopic rhythmic patterns are all of an alluringly artistic type. Many of them may often remind one of refined Bharata Natya steps, poses and movements.

Kummis had been most common during the celebration of the coming of age of girls in village households. While in the kummi, the dancers use their palms to clap and indicate the rhythm, in Kolattam they use two short coloured sticks for the purpose.

Of the many varieties of Kolattam the *Pinnal Kolattam* is the most spectacular and artistic. Coloured ribbons or thread ropes are hung from the front pole-end of a decorated festival palanquin and their loose ends are attached to the khol sticks of the dancers. When the dancing maidens move round and round in various rhythmic patterns beating the khol

sticks to the tunes and rhythms of the songs, the coloured ribbons get plaited first and then are unwound by contra-movements.

This Kolattam is ordinarily played as a spring festival. For a month before the appointed date, the young girls of the village go from house to house playing Kolattam and collect subscriptions in cash and festival materials. On the festival day they bathe early in the morning, cook and dine together, decorate themselves at their best in the evening and go round the streets in procession singing and dancing, with a decorated palanquin containing a picture or image of Lord Krishna. The Nagaswaram is the usual accompaniment to their music and the piper has to follow, in refrain, the songs of the girls as and when they are sung.

Perhaps through want of close touch with or good observation of Village folk art modes, some laudable efforts that are being made nowadays in schools in urban areas to cultivate this art are found to fall short of the natural grace and beauty naivete of the simple village type. The urban shows are made artificial and stilted by the introduction of some of the highly technical and sophisticated *adavujathis* of classical Bharata Natya. It is no improvement on the naivete, charm, grace and spontaneous gaiety of the village folk art.

Bhajan dance : Akin to this kummi is the Bhajana dance of pious men in temple festivals like Sri

Rama Navami and Krishnashtami. The devout men generally dance around a lighted brass lamp in the hall in front of the sanctum sanctorum of the deity. Some of the songs are of the folk type and others are of the classical *Kirtana* type. But the dances with all their variations in stepping, poses and movements are generally of the simple folk type.

Oyil Attam is a major folk dance of men and the village people take keen interest in it. The artistes are trained by an experienced Vadyar who is the head, guide and manager of the group. Normally the group consists of 15 to 20 men including the Vadyar and the accompanists on harmonium, Mridangam and Jalar. The dance is performed during village temple festivals. The popular themes are 'Rama Natakam' and 'Ponnar Sowcar Natakam' in the Trichy District varieties of the art. The dancers wear gaudy coloured trousers matched with a suitable shirt, a shoulder scarf, a towel, ankle bells and a staff, similar to the one carried by military officers. One man will begin the song and it will be responded in chorus by the rest of the group. The Oyil Attams are in vogue in Trichy, Madurai, and Coimbatore districts. In the Coimbatore variety, the themes mostly centre round Lord Muruga and Valli. *Valli Amman Oyil* is a favourite of that District.

The Vainthanay is a sort of Kolattam performed by men and ' *Urumi Komali Attam* ' is an exclusive

art of the Thotta Naickers of the Trichy District. The latter is called *Thevar Attam* also.

Chakkai Attam is another variety of social group dance by men. It seems to have originally been in vogue near about Nagapattinam and later to have spread to the Trichy District. There is no set story or theme in it. The songs are mostly on Lord Ammai Nathan or Muruga or Muthumaraianman, sung mostly in Ektal or Adi Tal. The costume consists of a special four cornered jacket from the ends of which tassels will be hanging. A coloured towel is tied round the head. 4 flat teak wood sticks each measuring about 7 inches long and $\frac{3}{4}$ inch in girth are strung in a thread and held between the fingers. To the sound produced by manipulating these sticks, the men dance as in Kummi and Kolattam. The accompaniments are Jalars and Kunthala Vadyam.

Dances of professional troupes: In this group, Bommalattam or Puppet show, the Kavadi dance, the Karakam dance, the Puravi Attam or Dummy Horse Dance (called also as Poikal Kudirai Attam in ordinary Tamil parlance), the Therukuthu or street drama and the Kuravan-Kurathi (or the dance of the gypsy couple) are important, in order of merit and necessary refinement.

The Bommalattam is perhaps the most refined and dignified. It seeks to expound Puranic stories in dramas with music, dancing and acting. It consists of using decorated dolls made of cloth and

wood as characters in a play and manipulating their bodies and limbs, by means of dark strings held in the hands of skilled operators from behind a short screen on the stage, to display dramatic action and dance to the accompaniment of background music. The story is developed mostly in songs with dialogues and short explanatory speeches in between so as to ensure continuity. The puppets are made not only to interpret the songs and dialogues with convincing action but also to dance Bharata Natya items like Alarippu, Jathiswaram and Tillana. The tension of the serious drama is often punctuated and relieved by vivacious comic interludes. Karakam, Pujari, Exorcising of evil spirits and Ammanai ball-play are some of the interesting interludes that are danced by the puppets. Background music is provided by one or two good-voiced vocalists accompanied by Flute, Mridangam, Harmonium and a pair of cymbals. The puppets are about two to three feet in height. Harishchandra is the traditional play enacted through them.

While marionette shows of varying degrees of artistry are to be found in other parts of India and elsewhere too in the world, the Tamil Nad art, is distinguished for two or three notable features, namely. (1) the refined quality of its music at times approaching the classical mode without the latter's obtrusive technique and hence moving in its appeal (2) the appreciable size, decoration and over-all beauty of the puppets so as to represent realistically

the characters of a play and (3) the superior quality of their acting and dancing with very human touches so as to successfully create the illusion, that live human beings are moving on the stage.

References in ancient Tamil literature to this kind of art as '*Pavai Kuthu*' lead one to infer, that it must have been in vogue from very early times. But as in many other matters relating to Indian art, any tracing of a long and continued history of this art may not be possible. Suffice it to say, that it seems to have had a spurt of new life and growth during the golden age of South Indian Fine Arts in the 18th century and the first half of the 19th. The kind of patronage vouchsafed by the Tanjore Royal Court to Carnatic Music and Bharata Natya of the Nattuva Mela and Bhagavata Mela types must have been extended to this kind of folk art also. Siddanaickenpet, Sri Vanchiyam, Puthukudi and other villages and Kumbakonam, all in the Tanjore District seem to have been the chief centres for the renaissance and development of this art, and many had been the great masters who had contributed to them. The inherent difficulty in practising this art and declining patronage from royal courts and the public led to a virtual eclipse of this traditional village art for a time in the first quarter of this century. But fortunately it has been preserved in tact by one family consisting of the brothers—A. S. Mani Iyer and A. Krishnamoorthy Iyer of Kumbakonam, who having learnt it from their

father Ayyavaier of Sri Vanchiyam Village, have renaciously kept it up against depressing circumstances. I took interest in it from about ten years ago and I have been giving consistent encouragement to it since then. Thanks to providence it is again coming to wide popularity and esteem all over India.

The Kavadi is too well known a type of folk dance to need any description. Most of the bhakthas of Lord Muruga take to it as a devotional offering to Him. The Kavadi is an arched wood and cloth work decorated artistically with peacock feathers, beads and tassels and with the wooden base-rod held on the neck of the dancer. This is swung round to dance movements. Some professional experts display amazing feats of skill in it by balancing and moving the kavadi on all parts of the body in various poses and attitudes without the support of the hands. The dance is dane according to the varied tunes of the *Kavadi Chindu*, a well known type of folk devotional song. The orchestra is *Naiyandi Melam* consisting of one or two Nagaswarams, an Otthu (a drone), two Tavils, one Pambai, one Thamuku and a pair of cymbals. The characteristic feature of the *Naiyandi Melam* is that, the instrumentalists also at times dance while playing their instruments.

The Karakam is dancing with a decorated mud pot of water on the head to the accompaniment of *Naiyandi Melam* described above. It is a dance

mostly to propitiate Mari Amman and other village deities to ward off droughts and epidemics and to bring in rains. As in the Kavadi, amazing feats of skill are displayed in Karakam also by experts who dance in all sorts of rhythmic patterns in all sorts of poses and attitudes, all the time beautifully balancing the mud pot on the head without the support of the hands.

The *Puravi Attam* or Poikal Kudirai Attam is yet another delectable type of folk dance. In it the figure of a horse is made with a bamboo frame work covered over with thick paper or card board. It is so lavishly painted and decorated as to resemble a well-bred palace-horse or war-horse. Through a whole on the back of the horse, the dancer stands with the upper portion of the body above his waist being seen and with his legs fitted up with short wooden stilts. In this mode he appears as if riding on the horse and he dances to the tune of an orchestra. According to tradition, Kuntala Vadyam a double drum instrument and Naiyandi Melam had been the usual orchestra and nowadays one or two troupes in this art seem to have gone in for a kind of European band with alien instruments which do not fit in with a typical Indian folk art.

Besides vivacious rides and pranks, the dancer executes thematic dances also interpreting short episodes like snake-charming, love making by royal persons, Sivaji receiving the victory sword from

Bhavani, the Mother Goddess and exorcising evil spirits. Bits of abhinaya also are introduced in interpreting episodes. But when this is indulged in too much, it detracts from the vivacity of the characteristic folk dances of the Dummy Horse. For want of corrective influences from cultured people, some of the dancers, are found also to indulge in many an inartistic circus-stunt and magical feat which ought to be discouraged. Unlike the other types of folk art which have been nurtured in the villages, the Dummy Horse Dance has been a part of royal processions and Kaman Padigai (Cupid's Festival) in the past and hence may be found lacking in the unsophisticated simplicity, naivete and spontaneity of all village folk art, though it may be found to be full of hilarity.

The Therukuthu of Tamil Nad and the *Veedhi Nataka* of Andhra Desa are dance-dramas of the folk type in which Puranic themes are presented in dramas with music, dance, speech and acting of a simple and spontaneous nature. With a small improvised thached pandal as a stage, and a sloping open ground in front to serve as an auditorium, these folk dances used to be expounded in connection with religious or temple festivals. They are now somewhat decadent.

The Kuravan-Kurathi dance is yet another type of folk art representing the habits and manners of the gypsies with their quaint speech, songs and movements.

The Shadow Play is the folk art of projecting on a white screen, silhouette shadows of small but full leather dolls acting and dancing, and interpreting Puranic stories or short episodes. It seems to have been mainly in the hands itinerant beggar troupes who used to move about from village to village, give their shows in street junctions and corners and receive what alms the village spectators chose to give. A number of dolls, an earthen lamp, a white upper cloth and a drum used to be all the materials and equipment for these beggar artistes. This kind of shadow play is practically extinct now in Tamil Nad.

The Tholu Bommalu Katha : The still extant type of shadow play is in Andhra Desha. Though it is not now a folk art of Tamil Nad, I may draw your attention to it as a delectable kindred art, of a neighbouring State which was closely connected with Tamil Nad till recently. In this art, Puranic character figures are carved out of flat leather pieces and painted richly. They are thrown against a tight-spread white screen from behind, within a well lighted stage and manipulated by skilled operators with long bamboo sticks to move, act and dance. Scenes from the Ramayana and Mahabharata are enacted. The depicting of the scenes of love and war is thrilling in its realism. Though the background music may sound rather crude to refined ears, the rhythm is strong and un-erring. Plenty of humour enlivens the shows all through. The operators of this kind of show are typical up-country folk and perhaps illiterate too. Yet it is a

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